July 1, 1991

THE NEW YORKER

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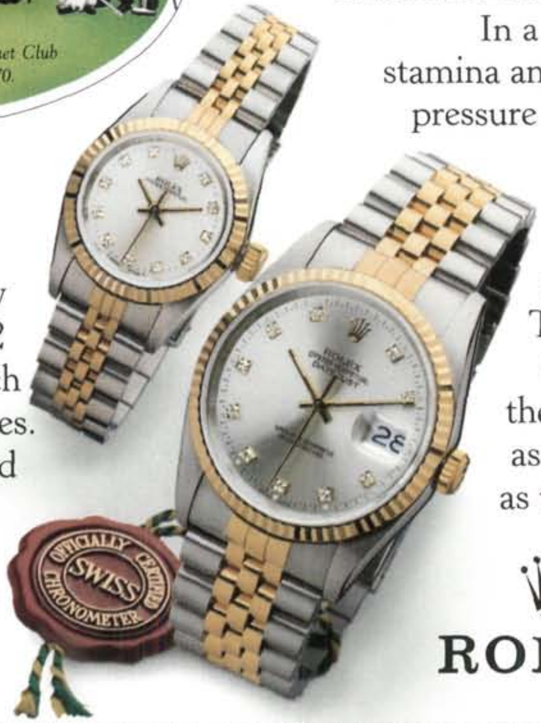

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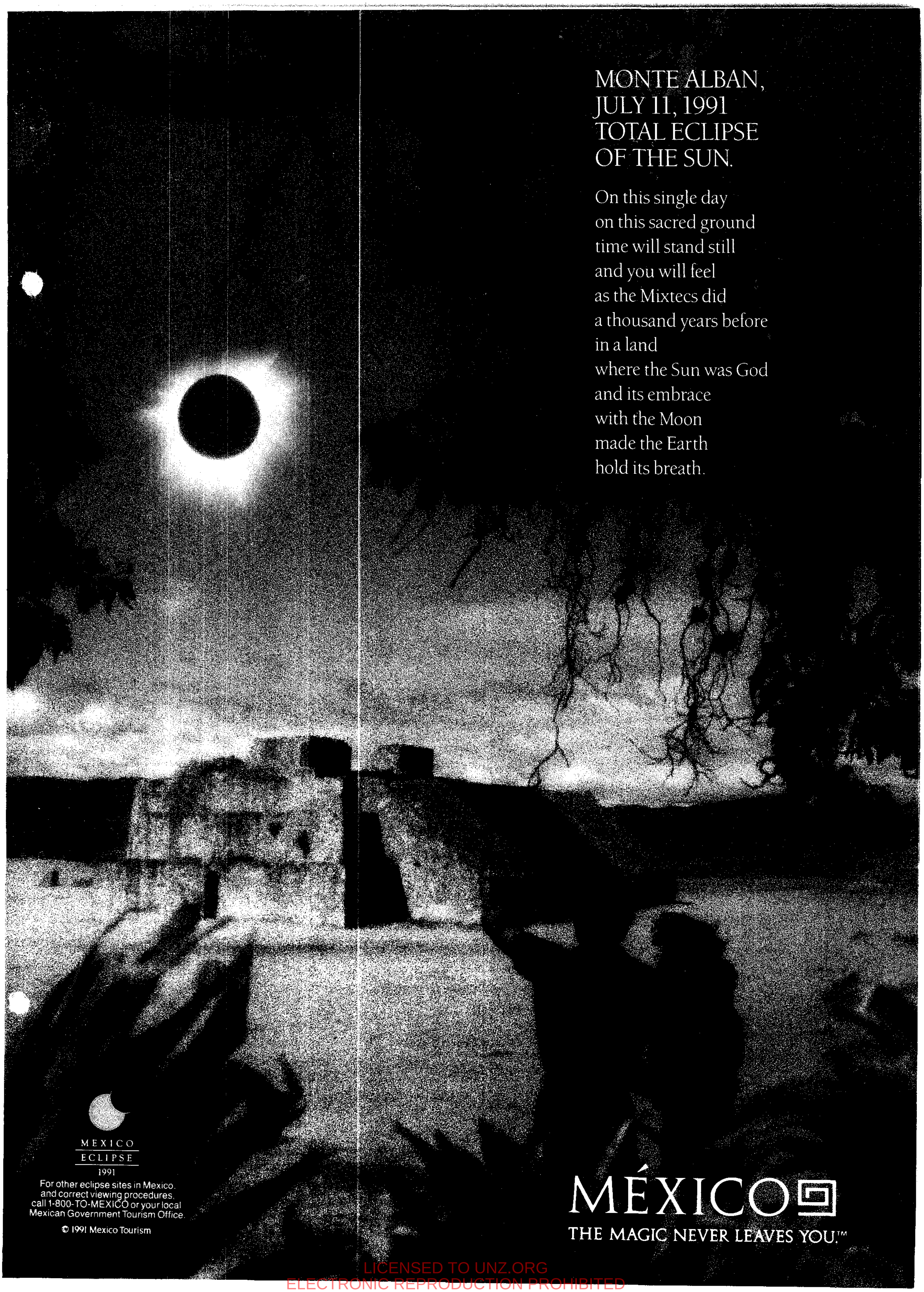

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE

IF Francis of Assisi is one of the most enduringly popular of Catholic saints, it is, in part, because each generation seems to find in his story exactly what it needs. In the 1973 film "Brother Sun, Sister Moon," for example, Franco Zeffirelli outfitted the thirteenth-century mystic in countercultural garb, giving him a hippie-like resolve to Question Authority and stressing his ability to commune with animals—as if the saint were some medieval Dr. Doolittle. In his 1983 opera "Saint François d'Assise," the French composer Olivier Messiaen enlarged the natural elements to mammoth proportions: every instrument in the orchestra, it seemed, produced some sort of birdcall. Anticipating charges that such an approach was oddly matched to a subject cherished for his simplicity, Messiaen wrote that the saint was rich "in the colors of the sky, of clouds, of trees, of grass, of flowers, in the sounds of the wind, in the power of the fire, and in the clarity of water," and so "a music high in colors of timbres . . . seems to me to be perfectly in harmony with his true interior nature." In contrast, the 1961 movie "Francis of Assisi," coming at the tail end of Hollywood's golden age of historical epics, retained the complexity but downplayed the animals. For the film's director, Michael Curtiz, the saint—like Paul, like Augustine—was a repentant hedonist turned crusader. Curtiz' approach exerted scant magic on critics, but it may have had an effect on the movie's female lead, Dolores Hart: she entered a convent two years after the movie was released.

The latest updating of the St. Francis story is the musical "Troubadour," at the Ubu Theatre (through June 30). The piece's major concerns—homelessness, the environment, the Middle East—have a good, contemporary feel. And while no one could accuse the show's creative team (Bert Draesel, music and book; John Martin, lyrics and book; D. J. Maloney, direction) of sophistication, nor the cast of subtlety, the ensemble's efforts are admirable. "Troubadour" makes one wonder just how St. Francis will be outfitted for the new millennium.

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for schedule and ticket information.)

Body and Soul—A new romantic comedy by John Glines, with David Boldt, Eddie Cobb, Randall Denman, Douglas Gibson, and Martin Outzen. Previews June 26-29. Opens June 30 at 7. (Courtyard Playhouse, 39 Grove St. 869-3530.)

Circle Repertory Company—The final play of the season is THE BALCONY SCENE, by Wil Calhoun. With Jonathan Hogan, Cynthia Nixon, and William Fichtner. Previews through June 29. Opens June 30 at 7:30. (99 Seventh Ave. S. 924-7100.)

Getting Married—A production of Shaw's comedy, with Victoria Tennant, Lee Richardson, Nicolas Coster, and Linda Thorson. Directed by Stephen Porter. Preview on June 25. Opens June 26 at 6:45. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

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Lips Together, Teeth Apart—Christine Baranski, Anthony Heald, Swoosie Kurtz, and Nathan Lane in a new play by Terrence McNally. John Tillinger directed. Opens June 25 at 8. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-7907.)

Othello—The first of three plays in the New York Shakespeare Festival's free summer series in the Park. Raul Julia, Christopher Walken, Mary Beth Hurt, and Kathryn Meisle lead the cast. Directed by Joe Dowling. Previews June 25-26. Opens June 27 at 8. (Delacorte, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about tickets, which are required, call 861-7277.)

Prom Queens Unchained—A musical by Larry Goodsight, Keith Herrmann, and Stephen Witkin. Previews through June 29. Opens June 30 at 7. (Village Gate, 160 Bleecker St. 475-5120.)

NEW THIS SEASON

And the World Goes 'Round: The Songs of Kander & Ebb—A musical revue, with Bob Cuccioli, Karen Mason, Brenda Pressley, Jim Walton, and Karen Ziëmba. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

Breaking Legs—The Mafia meets Off Broadway. Philip Bosco and Vincent Gardenia can seldom have been funnier than as a pair of mobsters who back a new play in order to win a young dramatist for Gardenia's daughter. Tom Dulack wrote the comedy; John Tillinger directed it. With Larry Storch, Victor Argo, Nicolas Surovy, and, above all, Sue Giosa as the daughter who spins the plot. (Reviewed in our issue of 6/3/91.) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

Charge It, Please—A comedy by Carlos Gorbea. Three performances a week are in English; four are in Spanish. (Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 354-1293. Closes July 28.)

Club Soda—A comedy by Leah Kornfeld Friedman, which was directed by Pamela Berlin. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523. Closes June 30.)

Encore!—A revue of songs from past musicals at the Jewish Repertory Theatre. (344 E. 14th St. 505-2667. Closes June 30.)

The Good Times Are Killing Me—The cartoonist Lynda Barry devised this memory play of words and pop tunes about a racially mixed neighborhood. At the heart of it is the friendship of two little girls, one white, the other black, who are delightfully portrayed by Angela Goethals and Chandra Wilson. The undercurrent of serious comment on race doesn't add much, but every humorous scene scores a bull's-eye. Also with Kim Staunton, Wendell Pierce, and Holly Felton. Mark Brokaw directed. (5/6/91) (Second Stage Theatre, Broadway at 76th St. 873-6103. Closes June 30.)

Gypsy—The Tyne Daly-led revival of the great Laurents-Styne-Sondheim musical has returned to Broadway for a limited engagement. It is so delightful—and the cast so engaging—that we think anyone would be happier for having seen it. One suggestion: don't applaud when Mama Rose comes down the aisle (you'll drown out the first number). (12/4/89) (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100. Closes July 14.)

The Have-Little—A play by Migdalia Cruz, which takes place in the South Bronx. (INTAR, 420 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes June 30.)

The Haunted Host and **Safe Sex**—A double bill consisting of a 1964 comedy by Robert Patrick and a revised 1987 comedy by Harvey Fierstein. Mr. Fierstein and Jason Workman make up the cast of both plays. (Actors Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 691-6226. Closes July 14.)

The Learned Ladies—A fifty-minute, all-male version of Molière's play. Adapted and directed by Douglas Garland. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 279-4200. Closes June 29.)

Lost in Yonkers—There's not one glimmer of honesty or authenticity in this family melodrama by Neil Simon. Set in Yonkers during the Second World War, it's about what happens when a cowering, pathetic man has to leave his two adolescent sons with his intimidating mother for the better part of a year. (3/11/91) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 221-1211.)

Love Lemmings—A satirical comedy revue by Joe DiPietro. With Steve Ahern, John Daggett, Helen Greenberg, and Kathryn Rossetter. Directed by Melia Bensussen. (Top of the Gate, 160 Bleecker St. 475-5120.)

Lusting After Pipino's Wife—A comedy by Sam Henry Kass. (45th Street Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 564-8038.)

Mambo Mouth—John Leguizamo portrays seven Hispanic characters in a one-man show. (Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.)

Miss Saigon—Oh, the horror! The horror! (4/29/91) (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200.)

Mr. Gogol and Mr. Preen—A new comedy by Elaine May, with Zohra Lampert, William H. Macy, and Mike Nussbaum. Directed by Gregory Mosher. (6/24/91) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Only the Truth Is Funny—The comedian Rick Reynolds' one-man show. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

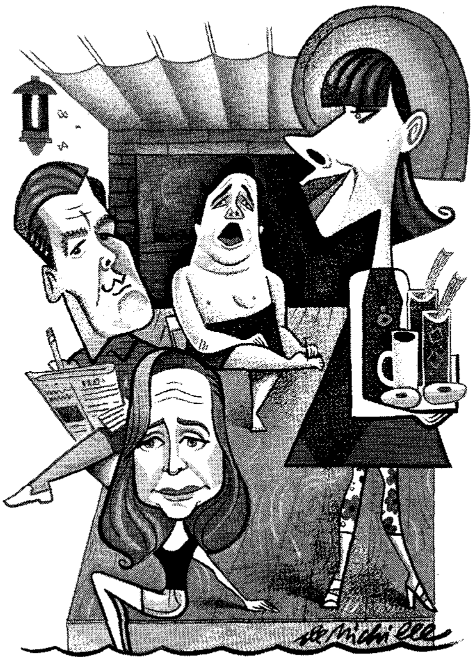
Pageant—A musical spoof of beauty contests. Book and lyrics by Bill Russell and Frank Kelly and music by Albert Evans. Conceived and directed by Robert Longbottom. (Blue Angel, 321 W. 44th St. 262-3333.)

Penn & Teller's Refrigerator Tour—The heavenly twain meet again. The new tricks are just as mysterious (and frightening) as the old ones. As for the tricksters, their bogus candor is intact, and they've never been funnier. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 246-0220. Closes June 29.)

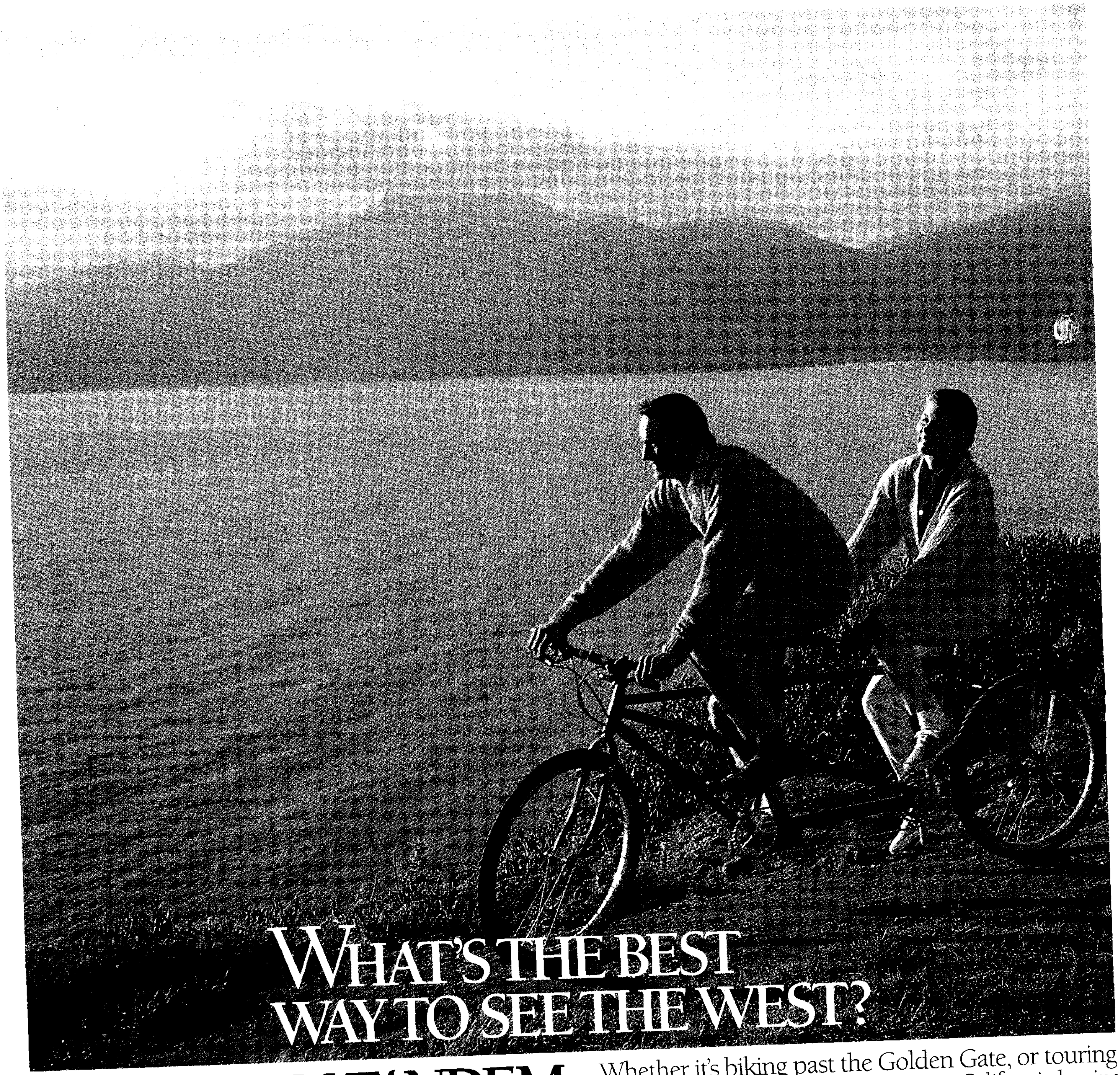
Red Scare on Sunset—Charles Busch wrote and stars in this comedy about an actress battling Communism in nineteen-fifties Hollywood. Directed by Kenneth Elliott. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 924-8782.)

Satan Never Sleeps—A play, with music, by Ronald Wyche and Weldon. (Billie Holiday, 1368 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 1-718 636-0918. Closes June 30.)

The Secret Garden—This lovely musical adaptation of the classic children's story by Frances Hodgson Burnett isn't just a kiddie show.



Anthony Heald, Swoosie Kurtz, Nathan Lane, and Christine Baranski in "Lips Together, Teeth Apart"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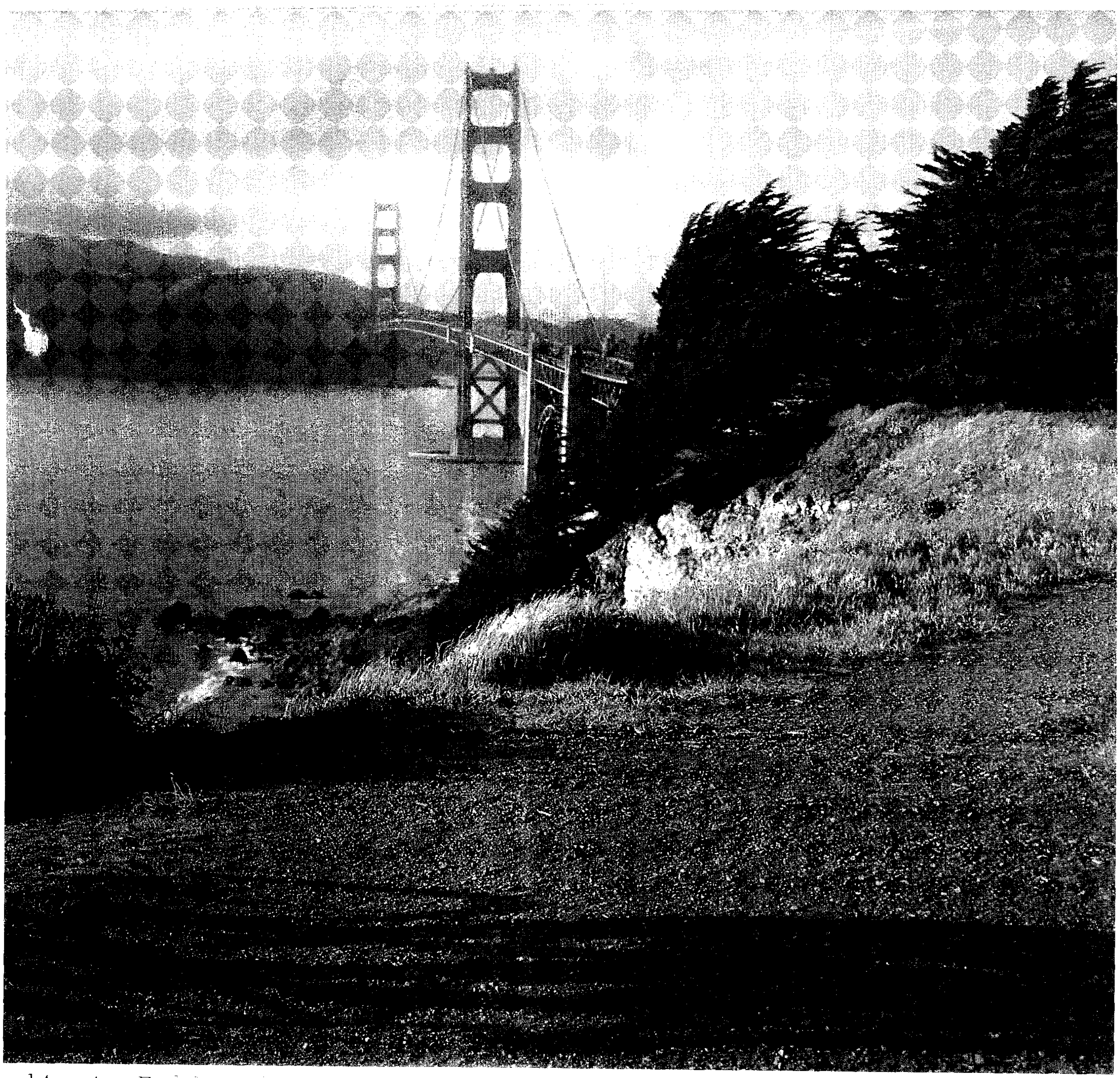

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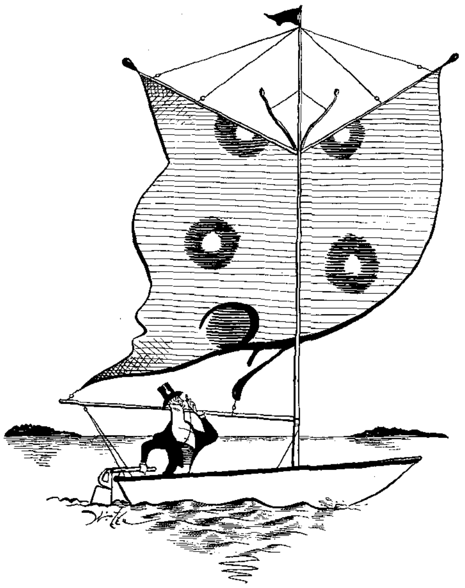
Subtle, charming, intelligent, and wholly literary in its approach to adaptation, it manages both to be faithful to the spirit of the book and to comment on the particular moment in time that produced it. (5/13/91) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Song of Singapore—A musical with a promising concept: turn a Polish veterans' hall into a Singapore night club, circa 1941, and spill murder and mayhem onto the premises. Unfortunately, the lavish settings (by John Lee Beatty) and the musical talent (led by the winsome and versatile Donna Murphy) cannot conceal a very thin story and a host of excruciatingly bad jokes. Another problem: on a busy night, the seating arrangements here can be extremely cramped. (17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. 228-0844.)



State Theatre of Lithuania—Presenting two plays: **UNCLE VANYA,** by Chekhov (through June 30), and **THE SQUARE,** a collaborative work by Eimuntas Nekrosius and the company (through July 7). Both plays are performed in Lithuanian, with simultaneous English translation. (Joyce, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800.)

The Subject Was Roses—A faithful revival of Frank Gilroy's bleak play about a Bronx couple named Cleary, on the weekend, in 1946, when their son returns from the Army. The actors are John Mahoney, Dana Ivey, and Patrick Dempsey, and they are first-rate. Jack Hofsiss directed. (Roundabout, 100 E. 17th St. 420-1883. Closes July 7.)

The Substance of Fire—Ron Rifkin gives an impeccable performance as a publisher—a refugee from Nazi Germany—whose difficulties with his grown children are no greater than those with himself. The play, by Jon Robin Baitz, is not flawless, but it is consistently absorbing and very well acted, under the direction of Daniel Sullivan. With Patrick Breen, Jon Tenney, and Maria Tucci. (4/1/91) (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes June 30.)

Troubadour—Christopher Howatt plays St. Francis of Assisi in a musical by Bert Draesel and John Martin. (Ubu Theatre, 15 W. 28th St. 673-3748. Closes June 30.)

The Will Rogers Follies—The sets by Tony Walton, the direction and choreography by Tommy Tune, the costumes by Willa Kim, and the row upon row of Ziegfeld girls make a feast for the eyes, but the funny bone and heart are neglected. Keith Carradine makes an engaging, amusing Rogers, but that is not enough, despite Cy Coleman's pleasant score. (5/13/91) (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 730-8200.)

LONG RUNS

CATS: Some twenty poems about cats by T. S. Eliot, set to music by Andrew Lloyd Webber. A mighty spectacle about mighty little, owing its effectiveness to Trevor Nunn's direction and to John Napier's sets and costumes. (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200.) . . . **CITY OF ANGELS:** Larry Gelbart, dramatist; Cy Coleman, composer; Billy Byers, arranger; and Michael Blakemore, director, are all in top form in this sharp, jokey musical satire about Hollywood in the forties. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.) . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** The longest-running long run turned thirty-one last month. (Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.) . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 1991½:** A source of continual merriment, this newly revised revue is a cluster of parodies of shows along the Great White Way. Gerard Alessandrini conceived and directed it, and wrote the witty, barbed lyrics. (Theatre East, 211 E. 60th St. 838-9090.) . . . **FOREVER PLAID:** Stuart Ross's loving tongue-in-cheek salute to the "guy groups" of the fifties is a real treat. Bring your mom. Hell, bring the whole family. (Steve McGraw's, 158 W. 72nd St. 595-7400.) . . . **GRAND HOTEL:** The dazzling imagination of Tommy Tune's direction and choreography and the dazzling scenery by Tony Walton almost make up for the inner vacancy of this show, but not quite. The story and characters are skimpy and the music is undistinguished. Nevertheless, there isn't a boring moment. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.) . . . **JACKIE MASON: BRAND NEW:** The comedian brings his one-man show to Broadway again. (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.) . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** The stars of this musical adaptation of the Victor Hugo novel are John Napier's settings and David Hersey's lighting. (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.) . . . **NUNSENSE:** A musical comedy by Dan Goggin. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-4321.) . . . **ONCE ON THIS ISLAND:** A musical by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty, which is based on Rosa Guy's 1985 novel, "My Love, My Love." (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.) . . . **OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY:** Jerry Sterner's comedy about a New York corporate raider's attempt to take over a decorous New England business maintains its suspense from beginning to end. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000. Closes June 30.) . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** This much ballyhooed Andrew Lloyd Webber musical is fun—if you're not bothered by theatre that cares not a whit for words and contains not one ghost of an idea. Except for the sets, everything about the show is negligible. (Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.) . . . **SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION:** You're best off knowing nothing about the John Guare play other than that it represents a perfect meeting of the playwright, director Jerry Zaks, and actress Stockard Channing. Out of a true story—one apparently about celebrity and Good Samaritanism—Guare has fashioned a wistful comedy about race, class, money, imagination, collective conscience, individual psyche, and the impulse toward art. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.) . . . **SMOKE ON THE MOUNTAIN:** This loving satire of old-time gospel music, set in 1938, is perfectly delightful. Written by Connie Ray, it re-creates a Saturday-night service at a small church in rural North Carolina, where a family of gospel singers have been invited to appear. With Reathel Bean and Kevin Chamberlain. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 997-1780. Closes June 30.) . . . **THE SUM OF US:** David Stevens' poignant comedy about how hard it is for parents and children to break free of each other (particularly if they get on too well) is set in present-day Australia. Depending on how you look at it, the play is either very dear and rather flawed or rather dear and very flawed. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 989-2020.)

DANCE

After a recent ceremony installing the George Balanchine Memorial Cross, friends and acquaintances of Balanchine joined the priests and parishioners of Holy Fathers' Church for a little "light refreshment." This turned out to be a sumptuous buffet of *zakuski* and caviar, conscientiously prepared by the church staff in memory of Balanchine, who was an excellent cook. "But first, a toast to Mr. B.," said Father Adrian, lifting a glass of iced vodka.

Father Adrian, who attended Balanchine in his last years and who remains an unofficial spiritual adviser to the New York City Ballet, told us that he had moved to the Holy Fathers' parish three years ago, and that as he went about restoring the dilapidated little church on West 153rd Street the idea of a Balanchine memorial in the form of a crucifix came to him. He went to Constantine Pylarinos, of Byzantion Woodcarvers, in Astoria, with his heart set on copying a particularly beautiful specimen from the late Byzantine period which is preserved in the Monastery of Chilander, in Greece. Mr. Pylarinos said that he would do his best. "But he warned me not to expect too much, because he'd never attempted anything so complicated before," Father Adrian said. "Then, when it was finished and set in place, I knew that it was exactly right."

The George Balanchine Memorial Cross is a processional crucifix nearly four feet high; when it is not being carried, it forms the central altarpiece at Holy Fathers,' flanked by two liturgical fans, which Mr. Pylarinos also executed. All three icons were gilded and painted, in the traditional medium of egg tempera, by workers at the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Monastery, in Jordanville, New York. The paintings on the cross depict the Crucifixion on one side, the Resurrection on the other.

During the service, Father Adrian recalled Balanchine's reflecting on the fact that he'd had two relatives who were clerics and that, as a child, he'd wanted to be one, too. " 'You know, Father,' he'd remarked, 'of course, I wanted to be a bishop.' "

"He did not become a cleric," Father Adrian said. "He became one of those to whom Peter in his first Epistle says the calling is given. He was called into service in order to bring beauty into the world."

IN TOWN

New York City Ballet—Final performances of the season. June 25 at 8: "Mother Goose," "Pas de Deux," "Duo Concertant," and "Who Cares?" . . . ¶ June 26 at 8: "Apollo," "Quiet City," "Allegro Brillante," and "The Concert." . . . ¶ June 27 at 8: "Episodes," "Robert Schumann's 'Davidsbündlertänze,' " and "Western Symphony." . . . ¶ June 28 at 8: "Allegro Brillante," "Ash," and "Who Cares?" . . . ¶ June 29 at 2: "Episodes," "Other Dances," "Quiet City," and "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue." . . . ¶ June 29 at 8: "Apollo," "Valse-Fantaisie," "Duo Concertant," and "Who Cares?" . . . ¶ June 30 at 1: "Mother Goose," "Pas de Deux," "Duo Concertant," and "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue." . . . ¶ June 30 at 7: "Apollo," "Ash," and "Western Symphony." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

Nanette Bearden Contemporary Dance Theatre—Three programs of mostly repertory works. (Theatre of the Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. June 26-28 at 7:30. For reservations, call 864-2929.)

Ton Simons and Dancers—Presenting the U.S. première of "Grace," a full-length work. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. June 27–29 at 8 and June 30 at 3 and 8.)

Kenneth King/Bryan Hayes and the X-Change Company—In works by Mr. King and Mr. Hayes. (Danspace Project/St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 529-2318. June 27-30 at 8:30.)

OUT OF TOWN

Jacob's Pillow—The Russian Village and Folk Festival, June 25-29. . . . ¶ The Margaret Jenkins Dance Company, July 2-3. (Becket, Mass. 1-413 243-0745.)

NIGHT LIFE

Eric Gales is a sixteen-year-old rock prodigy whose fierce, relentless guitar work will cause you either to make favorable comparisons to Jimi Hendrix or to run for your life. There simply isn't any middle ground. We saw the Eric Gales Band play an hour-long set at the Lone Star Roadhouse recently—our ears are still ringing, in fact—and we've heard the group's self-titled début album, which is being released this week by Elektra. Onstage, Gales was unapologetically flamboyant. Even when his brother Eugene, who is the band's singer, songwriter, and bassist, was in the midst of a verse, Eric would high-step on over to center stage, where he would swivel, preen, and shake the chain of bandannas that extended from beneath his wide-brimmed black hat. (The hat was perhaps a nod to another Hendrix disciple, the late Stevie Ray Vaughan, or maybe it was just a hat.)

Gales was a pleasure to watch, although he tends to pull out all the stops on every single solo—torturing the guitar strings, shaking the instrument in front of his amp to add a little feedback to his feedback, and, at one point, playing behind his neck—so that after a couple of songs we felt as if we had seen every trick in his book. "The Eric Gales Band," too, sounds a little like one long guitar solo. Still, Eugene Gales is a competent enough songwriter, and he and drummer Hubert Crawford, Jr., make for a tight, propulsive rhythm section. While there's a frustrating sameness to much of the band's music, the group does serve as a showcase for Eric Gales' pyrotechnics—a showcase the teen-ager has been waiting for all his life. As Gales put it in an interview recently, "I knew what kind of tone I wanted by the time I was ten."

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type is used to pick out a few of the more notable performers in town. . . . ¶ Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives that are subject to last-minute change; it is therefore always advisable to call ahead.)

Ballroom, 253 W. 28th St. (244-3005)—A tony cabaret attained by passing through an opulent tapas restaurant, where wicker baskets overflow with fruit and vegetables and a row of hams hang over the bar; if you haven't had dinner, you may never make it to the show. As of June 25, the club belongs to former "Saturday Night Live" comic **terry sweeney,** who'll be doing his now-famous Nancy Reagan impersonation in a show called "It's Still My Turn." The evening ends with Sweeney's Nancy singing new lyrics to "Rose's Turn," from "Gypsy." Shows Tuesdays through Thursdays at nine, Fridays and Saturdays at nine and eleven-fifteen.

Birdland, 2745 Broadway, at 105th St. (749-2228)—The jazz personnel turns over nearly every night at this airy, loftlike restaurant-bar, in the gray zone between Zabar's and Columbia. Some may cry gentrification at the sight of the pastel walls, the potted greenery, and the bar crowded with Frascati sippers, but the floor-to-ceiling windows make for some fine Broadway-viewing. Doug MacDonald's trio plays on June 25, and Scott Kreitzer's quartet on June 26. **houston person** and **etta jones** take hold June 28-29 and the **bertha hope** trio is in on June 30. Music from nine. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—A sometimes delightful, sometimes infuriating meeting place for jazz legends and tourists. June 25-30 belongs to the **paquito d' rivera** sextet, who'll be sharing the bill with the **les mc cann** quartet; as of July 2, the stage will be held by **eddie palmieri** and his Afro-Cuban Jazz Ensemble, who'll be sharing their bill with the **hilton ruiz** quintet. First set at nine. Dining.

Bradley's, 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—A neighborhood bar in the heart of N.Y.U. country. It's advisable to get all your talking done between sets, because once the first chord is struck the audience here—with a little help from the management—becomes as quiet as a church congregation. The **vincent herring** quartet comes in June 24-29. Music from nine-forty-five. Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and **bobby short,** who wraps up his twenty-fourth springtime stretch here on June 29. Mr. Short, who is accompanied by a bassist and a drummer, commands the room like a jovial, mischievous headmaster. He has trouble sitting still, it seems: he keeps rising from the piano bench to snap his fingers, emphasize a lyric, or address the audience. His selections are uniformly witty and sly—Porter is a great favorite—and his own patter rises to the same standard. "I use a lot of French," he'll say with his crisp, haughty-sounding diction, "because I find that it makes the cover charge more digestible." Sets at nine-thirty and eleven-thirty Tuesdays through Saturdays. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans' Bar, **barbara carroll** presides at the piano (through June 29) from nine-thirty Tuesdays through Saturdays.

Cat Club, 76 E. 13th St. (505-0090)—Bell-bottoms and peace signs aren't the only nostalgia craze in town: at the Cat Club, on Sunday nights, the nineteen-thirties are in vogue. On other nights of the week, the club attracts a scruffy leather-and-lace crowd, but Sundays belong to the Swing Dance Society, whose passion is the Lindy Hop, a dance named after Charles Lindbergh. The dancers are young and old, graceful and flat-footed; the drink of choice is the Swing Dance Punch; the staff looks alternately bemused and bewildered by the genteel crowd. June 30 belongs to the **cliff small** orchestra. Music from eight to midnight.

Condon's, 117 E. 15th St. (254-0960)—Jazz clubs aren't always known for their romantic atmosphere, but Condon's earns higher marks than most. It's a low-ceilinged establishment, with lemon walls and abundant candlelight. They rearranged the furniture here a while back, so that now a greater number of people look at the stage rather than at a pole. The **clifford jordan** big band will be here through July 1; the **louis hayes** quintet starts up on July 2. Music after nine.

Continental Divide, 25 Third Ave., at St. Marks Pl. (529-6924)—Hipsters, posers, N.Y.U. students, the occasional skinhead—a typical East Village bar. The motif is prehistoric punk—a Stone Age mural, assorted toy dinosaurs, and pterodactyls—and on peak nights there's a take-no-prisoners atmosphere. Shows Sundays through Thursdays at ten, Fridays and Saturdays at eleven.

Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. (989-9319)—In the basement of this tucked-away Village restaurant-bar is a narrow, white-brick-walled room, decorated with a few tables and steampipes, where you'll find music, poetry readings, and theatre-of-the-cramped. The restaurant itself is a wine-and-candle-light neighborhood café; downstairs, there's a sixties-coffeehouse aesthetic at work. Upcoming events: the Jamie Baum quartet, with Vic Juris and Jeff Hirshfield, on June 27; the Richard Boukas trio on June 28; and Cheryl Pyle on June 29. Music begins at nine.

Diva, 306 E. 81st St. (650-1928)—A newly hatched restaurant and piano bar. It's a modest-sized, brick-walled room that offers Italian fare and the musings of pianists, including **charles de forest** every Tuesday through Saturday. Music from eight-thirty. Closed Sundays.

Eagle Tavern, 355 W. 14th St. (924-0275)—An Irish pub in the meat-packing district, not too far from the boondocks. In the front room, barbirds study the TV and growl about one thing or another, and in the back room another crowd listens to Irish folk musicians (on Fridays) and acoustic guitarists (on Saturdays). Three of the latter—Jay Byrd, Diana Feldman, and Final Cry—share the bill on June 29.

Fat Tuesday's, 190 Third Ave., at 17th St. (533-7902)—The seating arrangement in this long, narrow, red-velvet-and-mirror-walled basement makes flying coach seem roomy; nevertheless, it's one of the city's top jazz spots—thanks largely to the club's talent bookers. **mose allison,** a jazz-blues singer and composer, is on the premises June 25-30. On Mondays, guitarist-inventor **les paul** leads a trio. Music from eight. Dining.

Fortune Garden Pavilion, 209 E. 49th St. (753-0101)—With jazz you get eggroll. At this posh-looking two-floor Chinese restaurant, tucked into a midtown skyscraper, you'll find a lot of businesspeople and a lot of hanging plants. In the middle of the main dining room, you'll also find clarinettist **rick hardeman,** leading a quartet, through June 30. The hard-swinging pianist **dave mc kenna,** a recent favorite in this room, begins an engagement on July 2. Music from six-thirty.

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—An Old New York kind of place, with dark-wood panelling, white tablecloths, and brass-figurine lamps. Pianist **john bunch** and bassist **jay leonhart** are on duty June 27-29. Music from nine-forty-five.

Knitting Factory, 47 E. Houston St., near Mulberry St. (219-3055)—Situated in a neighborhood that boasts the Puck Building to the west and a host of windshield washers to the east, this space provides a forum for free-thinking musicians. Beat and melody are optional, "music" and "noise" relative terms. A festival called "What Is Jazz?" is currently under way. A few highlights: **bobby previte's empty suits** on June 26; the **marty ehrlich** quintet and the **thomas chapin** trio on June 27; the **butch morris** ensemble on June 28; the **semantics** and others on June 29; and the **lindsay horner** trio on June 30. Music after nine.

Manny's Car Wash, 1558 Third Ave., at 87th St. (369-2583)—A bright spot on the Upper East Side club scene. Don't go expecting to be sprayed with soapy water and massaged by large brushes: the fluorescent sign outside is the only car-wash reference. Inside, the place looks like an adman's idea of a blues bar. The Virginia-born **holmes brothers,** who appear here on July 2, had been toiling in obscurity until a few years ago, when critics and record-company scouts began to take notice of their propulsive blend of backwater blues, roadhouse R. & B., and gospel. The brothers have several decades of club experience under their belts, and their shows are muscular, feet-stirring displays of solid musicianship. Sets from nine-fifteen except on Sundays, when shows begin at eight-thirty.

Marquee, 547 W. 21st St. (929-3257)—The current front-runner on the alternative-music scene. The singer-songwriter **julian cope,** who once headed up the Teardrop Explodes and who's known for his idiosyncratic pop, appears on June 26 at nine.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (1-201 798-4064)—This is a smallish, back-room affair with a dingy stage and a baby grand someone apparently tried to cover with papier-mâché. Still, the bookers know their college-radio playlists and fine alternative bands show up here regularly. The eccentric, Cleveland-spawned rock outfit **pere ubu**—of whom a critic once wrote, "Pere Ubu is to Devo what Arnold Schoenberg was to Irving Berlin"—will be performing here on June 27. The **toasters** will appear on June 29. Shows at ten on Thursdays, and at eleven on Fridays and Saturdays.

Michael's Pub, 211 E. 55th St. (758-2272)—A midtown restaurant and jazz lair for the tasselled-loafers set. The dark, sombre bar (carved-wood lions, iron grillwork) looks like a place you'd find in London's financial district; the dining room—putting-green carpet, lime-green leather banquettes, panelled ceiling—has more of a country-club feel. Carol Woods is currently singing songs made famous by the late Pearl Bailey. Shows Tuesdays through Saturdays at nine-thirty and eleven-thirty.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza. (632-5000)—A great, pricey cabaret in the sky. **betty buckley,** a well-known personage in film, in television, and on Broadway (she won a Tony for her performance in "Cats"), is in the midst of a run here. The show, titled "Unchained Melody," concentrates largely on pop tunes. Shows from nine. Dining. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

Red Blazer Too, 349 W. 46th St. (262-3112)—A place where a fella and a gal can put on the feedbag, get a little tight, and cut a rug. When the band is swinging, and you and your dreamboat are cheek to cheek, everything can seem just swell. Mondays and Tuesdays are the property of **VINCE GIORDANO AND THE NIGHTHAWKS,** a band that relies on period instruments, old-fashioned felt-bannered music stands, and original-score arrangements to re-create the look and sound of a thirties swing outfit. Fridays belong to Sam Ulano and his Dixielanders, and Saturdays to Bob Cantwell and his Stompers. On July 3 you can catch the Bob Litwack group, with trumpeter **WARREN VACHÉ, JR.** Show times vary.

SOUNDS OF BRAZIL, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—A big, cheerful room where you can pick 'em up and set 'em down to sounds from Brazil, Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere. The **BRAND NEW HEAVIES** are here on June 26; **BERNIE WORRELL** claims July 4. A frenzied dance party known as Frankie Jackson's Soul Kitchen takes place on Tuesdays; **GREG OSBY** is the guest artist on July 2. Closed Sundays. Dining.

SPO-DEE-O-DEE, 565 W. 23rd St. (206-1990)—A night club in a part of Chelsea the real-estate agents don't show you. It's a modest-sized space, with room to dance, a stage that's occupied most nights, and a décor that includes Victorian-style chandeliers, movie-theatre drapes, and murals of Cotton Club-era dancers. At peak hours (late), you'll get an eyeful of waves, perms, teased and sprayed locks, lip gloss, pumps, fishnets, fringed jackets, leather pants, and designer-outlet New Wave apparel.

SWEET BASIL, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—An itinerary stop for the international jazz groupies who, on any given night, can be seen roaming the streets of the Village. Up front, there's a glass-enclosed sidewalk café; in back is a larger room, with a pressed-tin ceiling, red brick, and more pinewood than a ski lodge. Pianist **JOHN HICKS,** who'll be leading an all-star group here as of June 26, has been remarkably productive in the last year or so. Aside from releasing his first solo album, Hicks can be heard on new albums by Gary Bartz (who'll be with him at Sweet Basil), David Murray, Roy Hargrove, and Peter Leitch. The **STEVE LACY** sextet starts up on July 2. An electrified big band belonging to trumpeter Miles Evans is in action on Mondays. Tee-off time is ten. Dining.

VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—The late Max Gordon, who opened this holiest of jazz shrines in 1935, once described the club's early patrons as a mix of "poets, W.P.A. writers, hustlers, broads on the make, and moochers." The **TOMMY FLANAGAN** trio is in session here through June 30. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays. Music after nine-thirty.

WETLANDS, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Two floors of no-nuke veggie entertainment and consciousness-raising. Listen to bands play in the Summer of Love-muralled back room; buy a tie-dyed T-shirt at the Volkswagen-bus curio shop; catch up on current events at the bulletin board and community calendar. Or, if you'd rather just be mellow, crash out in the basement hippie love pad. The **SPIN DOCTORS** will be here June 27-28; **SAVOY TRUFFLE** and **KINGFISH** appear on June 29; and **CASSELBERRY-DUPREÉ** performs on June 30. Shows from ten.

ZANZIBAR & GRILL, 550 Third Ave., at 36th St. (779-0606)—The logo that appears on glasses, napkins, and matchbooks here—a bongo-playing monkey in fez and shades—embodies this pleasant restaurant-bar's blend of Africana and yuppie cool. The eponymous island is evoked by live palms, Rousseau-style murals, and etched-glass jungle scenes; Murray Hill is evoked by everything else.

ZINNO, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—One of those snazzy, awninged eateries you've seen nestled amid brownstones in the Village and always wondered about. The piano-and-bass duo of **LYNNE ARRIALE** and **RAY DRUMMOND** plays here through June 29. Music from eight. Closed Sundays.

Julian Cope at the Marquee

EDGE OF NIGHT LIFE

NOT much in the city works very well these days, so we should probably be real grateful for the new, acoustically correct big-top band shell and the twenty-four speaker towers that will now transmit the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic when they play in Central Park. But, at the first concert-picnic of the season, eighty thousand chicken-lickin', jug-wine-chugging, Ebinger's-blackout-cake-gobbling Verdi vivants discovered something more important for future alfresco evenings than the staying power of Luciano Pavarotti's voice: There is no longer anything Great about the Great Lawn.

Anyone want to do an environmental production of "The Grapes of Wrath"? Direct a low-budget sequel to "Swamp Thing"? No need to waste a nickel on location scouting. With nary a blade of Merion Blue or even crabgrass to rest a tush on, the lawn was so bad that many cultural squatters brought along both lawn chairs and plastic trash-can liners. But things got even worse when, half an hour after the tenor began singing, the rains came in a big way. "Down in front," yelled one fool to those who were trying to discern any sign of retreat on the stage, where proceedings had come to a halt. "Yeah, right. You keep sitting in it," was what he got back in spades. Several diehards tried to razz the umbrellaless who were giving up sooner than New Yorkers—by unwritten law—are allowed to. But a second Ranchipurian downpour brought mass trampling toward Fifth and Central Park West. Some people went barefoot, and others tried stretching Ziploc bags around their sandals. "Next time, I'm bringing a shower curtain," said one woman, tripping over a destroyed queen-size flat sheet. "Next time, I'm bringing sod," said one man, clutching his once-white Topsiders. The only person whose feelings did not meet with approval was the young man who philosophically labelled it all "an experience" and, echoing one of the T-shirts from a previous year's series, pointed out that the concert was, after all, "absolutely free." "Tell it to the dry cleaners" was the most polite retort he heard.

IN ANOTHER CATEGORY—PERFORMANCE ART, ETC.

BLUE MAN GROUP—No longer bald, no longer mute, no longer blue. Their new work is called "R & D." (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 869-3530. June 26-28 and June 30 at 8, and June 29 at 8 and 10:30.)

DEB MARGOLIN—In a reprise of "1-900 DEBB," in which the performance artist promises to dance like Madonna. (Interart Theatre, 549 W. 52nd St. 246-1050. June 25-28 at 8, and June 29 at 7:30 and 10.)

ART

GIAN MARCO MONTESANO'S paintings (at Nosei, 100 Prince Street; through July 3) are wanly funny at first. With their Necco-wafer colors and their nostalgic themes—little Polish girls, perhaps, in national costume, or a shepherd from the Ticino in town with his sheep—they look like clever, newly minted samples of trans-European, transavantgardist Ur-kitsch. Deeper subtleties, however, soon emerge. Virtually all the official state images of modern Europe, in fact, seem to collide and blur in Montesano's surprisingly poetic and lyrically painted genre pieces. His 1991 painting of Russian schoolchildren on a class outing with their teacher, for example, is a masterpiece of ambiguity. It could be a send-up of *glasnost*, of Soviet social realism, of a generic patriotism—or a sort of quirky paean to childhood in general, in its more regimented forms, by a kind of politically, rather than erotically, perverse Balthus. Another work, a large indigo painting of a small boy sitting with a grown woman at the edge of an Alpine lake, evokes the prewar melancholy of a "Magic Mountain" convalescence. But it might just as easily be the record of an existential moment between a mother and son, during an otherwise pleasant, Communist-state-paid vacation. A portrait of a boy in lederhosen singing in the woods—Tyrolean? Styrian? Carpathian?—is both a "harmless" travelogue cliché and an echo of Nazi youth.

Montesano is especially drawn to the motifs of Eastern Europe. He has said that he feels certain "values" are most alive where material constraints abound—in the land of playwright presidents, for instance. But in his work, even folkloric costumes are open to some confusion. There isn't much difference, his paintings suggest, between an embroidered peasant blouse from northern Italy and one from Romania. Yet Montesano's painting titled "They Were Friends When They Were Small," a portrait of a small girl who's holding a tiny sparrow and wearing such a blouse, blasts apart all such pieties as are most often uttered over dead bodies in the aftermath of a feud or a war.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—A hundred and fifty sculptures, drawings, and decorative objects by Paul Manship (1885-1966). . . . ¶ Walter Annenberg, who made a name for himself as the publisher of *TV Guide,* turned down a billion-dollar offer for his modern-art collection and chose instead the nobler path of philanthropy by bequeathing it to this museum several months ago. The gift of the collection, which was perhaps the finest grouping of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings still in private hands, set a new standard of excellence for future patrons of the arts. The show begins with some exquisite small works by Fantin-Latour, followed by two rooms devoted to Monet, van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cézanne that would be the pride of any museum. These rooms include some of the collection's finest works, such as Monet's "Poppy Field, Argenteuil" (1875), Gauguin's "The Siesta" (1892-94), and Cézanne's "The House with the Cracked Walls" (1892-94), all of which were purchased by Annenberg in

1983 from his sister, Enid Haupt. Farther on are some very good early-twentieth-century works, including Picasso's haunting "At the Lapin Agile" (1905), an important but somewhat overwrought Vuillard, a beautiful Matisse, and a very pretty Bonnard; these works, however, are not up to the same level as the great Impressionist ones. . . . ¶ "The Sculpture of Indonesia" includes bronzes, life-size stone sculptures, and ceremonial objects dating from the eighth century to the fifteenth. Through Aug. 18. . . . ¶ Illuminated pages and decorative designs from Islamic books produced in Iran, Turkey, and India from the fourteenth century through the nineteenth. Through Aug. 18. . . . **NOTE:** The museum's roof garden, planted with nine sculptures by Rodin, is open when the weather permits. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St.—Ninety-five paintings, collages, and gouaches by Ad Reinhardt (1913-67). . . . ¶ "Seven Master Printmakers: Innovations in the Eighties." A respectable yet somewhat anachronistic exhibition, loaded with nostalgia for the days when an artistic canon was firmly in place. It is the curator's contention that all the artists in the show, who rose to prominence in the sixties, continued to be innovators in the eighties. Of all the artists shown, Jasper Johns has remained the most engaged in the process of printmaking. Be they etchings, lithographs, or monotypes, Johns' works are exquisite records of gesture. The selection of his prints here forms a thoughtful counterpoint to the retrospective of his drawings mounted recently at the Whitney. As for David Hockney and Jim Dine, they have produced little of historical interest in the eighties, and nowhere is this more evident than in their prints. There is a lot of experimentation in Frank Stella's prints from the decade, but of a sort that perhaps only a technician could love. James Rosenquist entered some risky territory with his eighties prints, and the payoff was great, at times perhaps even greater than in his paintings. Roy Lichtenstein is an undeniable master of the medium, but the selection here is unsatisfying. Robert Rauschenberg is a master, too, and shown here are the kinds of collaged images he does best, but their technique is virtually indistinguishable from what he was doing twenty-five years ago. All this leads us to the question, What *were* the innovations of the eighties? Through Aug. 13. . . . ¶ A small but pleasurably edifying show of drawings and models by the landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx. A Brazilian who works mainly in his own country, Burle Marx is an uncompromisingly modern gardener who sculpts and paints with nature in broad, mid-century rhythms and bold strokes. If his emphasis on rubber plants sometimes harks back to all those progressive corporate lobbies of the fifties, his most panoramic vistas still have the big, beautiful look of Tomorrow. Through Aug. 13. . . . ¶ A video installation by Thierry Kuntzel is the latest in the "Projects" series. Starts June 28. (Open daily, except Wednesdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—The museum is closed for renovation until early 1992.

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—The Biennial is winding down; work by seventies and eighties artists is on the third floor, through June 30, and work by late-eighties and nineties debs is on the fourth floor, through July 7. . . . ¶ Forty-five sculptures, drawings, and various objects made by Hunt Diederich (1884-1953). (Open Tuesdays, 1 to 8, with no admission charge after 6; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 5; Sundays, noon to 6.)

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway—Chris Burden's installation, titled "Medusa's Head," is a five-ton hanging sphere composed of stone and toy trains. Starts June 28. . . . ¶ "Quattrocento: Early Italian Panel Paintings." . . . ¶ Forty works of art from Oceania (mostly from the Sepik and Ramu river basins in New Guinea), including three-inch-long fishhooks, three monumental carved-wood "guardians," and a skull rack made of palm, raffia, and bamboo. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St.—"The Story of a Painting: A Korean Buddhist Treasure from the Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation." This scholar's dream show takes a single work of art and casts about in several different historical directions at once. The painting under examination, known as the Burke Triad, depicts the Buddha and two attendant bodhisattvas, and is a rare example of pre-invasion Buddhist art. The show also provides a mini-history of the triad form, a view of Korean Buddhist monastic life, and a sampling of later Korean painting, much of which has a marvellous flattened, Netherlandish space. It's a tightly packed display, fascinating and at times confusing. On the whole it offers a somewhat loopy view, mostly due to the breadth of the subjects and the smallness of the exhibition. Nevertheless, there are several rich works to savor. Through July 28. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6; Sundays, noon to 5.)

Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse—"The Nearest Edge of the World," an exhibition of works in several mediums by nine contemporary artists from Cuba. Through Aug. 4. (Open weekdays, except Fridays, 10 to 4:30; Sundays, 11 to 4:30.)

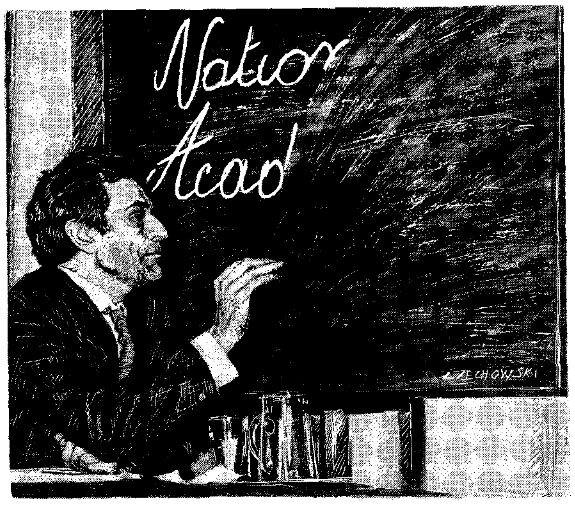
Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St.—"From Pontormo to Seurat," a show of sixty-one drawings from the Art Institute of Chicago, including works by Gainsborough, Géricault, Redon, Delacroix, and Degas. Through July 7. (Open daily, except Mondays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

Jewish Museum, at the New-York Historical Society, 170 Central Park W., at 77th St.—"Painting a Place in America: Jewish Artists in New York, 1900-45." Jewish painters and sculptors have certainly made contributions to the history of twentieth-century American art, but this is a silly idea for an exhibition, and no great historical insight is gained by the segregation. The organizers attempt to give purpose to their presentation by structuring the material around several educational and trade groups that fostered Jewish learning and identity. What the viewer is left with, however, is primarily an impression of second-rate, labored art—the essentially boring heaviness of urban social realism, as typified by the Soyer brothers and provincial abstraction. But there are some delightful discoveries in the show—works by artists who would likely be overlooked by other art histories. They include a Cubistic 1915 portrait of Marsden Hartley, both witty and gripping, by Ben Benn, and an Old World circus scene by Benjamin Kopman, with shades of Chagall, Ensor, and Marc. The issue of Jewish identity in modern American art gets interesting at the point where the exhibition ends, with the work of Newman, Rothko, and Gottlieb. The influence of Jewish mysticism on this trio's new art of spirituality is barely given a nod. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Sundays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 3.)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St.—"Mozart: Prodigy of Nature." A comprehensive exhibition of all things Mozart. The show includes more than fifty manuscripts, from four pieces composed at age five to a first draft of the Requiem; early letters home from his first trip to Italy (December, 1769) and his last letter to his father (April, 1787); and his "Verzeichnüss aller meiner Werke" ("Catalogue of All My Works"), which he kept for the last seven years of his life. Through Aug. 4. . . . ¶ Eighteenth-century drawings, from the library's collection, by the Venetian masters Tiepolo, Guardi, and Canaletto. Through Aug. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10:30 to 5; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

The New Museum, 583 Broadway—"Africa Explores: Twentieth-Century African Art" presents more than a hundred art works in various mediums. The works are divided into five categories: "Traditional," "New Functional," "Urban," "International," and "Extinct." The Center for African Art has organized the exhibition, which runs simultaneously in its galleries, at 54 E. 68th St. (Open daily, except Mondays; open Sundays at noon.) Through Aug. 18. . . . ¶ In a show called "Embodying Faith," five contemporary artists tackle the theme of the relationship between the physical and the spiritual in Christianity. Through Aug. 18. . . . ¶ In the museum's Broadway windows is an installation by the Catalan artist Perejaume, titled "Pintura i Representació," that consists of two visitor-accessible rows of theatre seats. Through Aug. 18. . . . ¶ "Eclipse of the Earth," an installation by Kazuo Katase. Through Aug. 18. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, noon to 8.)

New-York Historical Society, 170 Central Park W., at 77th St.—"The Taste of Andrew Carnegie." The Scottish-born steel industrialist seemed to understand the difference between taste and historical judgment. His taste tended toward brooding Victoriana—sentimental peasant scenes and uninspiringly picturesque landscapes—but when it came to his legacy he trusted the experts and displayed a faith in public institutions that was unparalleled. By the time he died, in 1919, he had given away ninety per cent of his fortune to fund universities, concert halls (including New York's Carnegie), Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute, and more than twenty-five hundred libraries. This small show includes some of Carnegie's mediocre personal collection as well as selections from a fine print collection, including examples by Dürer and Goltzius, from the Carnegie Institute. The most enjoyable part of the show is the memorabilia, such as a menu from a dinner in Carnegie's honor that describes the "Bieffe" course as "Wut's Good's all Scotch, all that isn't ain't." Through Aug. 4. . . . ¶ "Justice Rendered" is a show of forty documents and art works related to the three-hundred-year history of the New York Supreme Court. Through July 7. . . . ¶ Sixty drawings, photographs, and prints of New York structures built at the turn of the century by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White. Through Aug. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)



Marcel Broodthaers

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.—"Kingdoms of Land, Sea, and Sky" includes a hundred and eighty zoological woodcuts, engravings, and watercolors by artists and naturalists such as Albrecht Dürer, John James Audubon, Edward Lear, and Maria Sibylla Merian. Through Aug. 24. (Gottesman Exhibition Hall. Open Mondays through Wednesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6.) . . . ¶ Sixty-three prints by Reginald Marsh (1898-1954), depicting New York scenes from the twenties and thirties. Through June 29. (Third Floor Gallery. Open Mondays through Wednesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6.) . . . ¶ A display of recently acquired rare books and manuscripts, including Joseph Conrad's manuscript for "The Secret Sharer" and Washington Irving's manuscript for "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." (Berg Collection. Open Mondays through Wednesdays, 11 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

Queens Museum, Flushing Meadow Park—"Interrelations and Migration: Contemporary Sculpture from Germany" is an exhibition of four artists—Erwin Heerich, Norbert Kricke, Abraham David Christian, and Katsuhito Nishikawa—who have worked in Düsseldorf. Through July 7. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM, 144 W. 125th St.—A retrospective of works by Romare Bearden (1912-88), which includes a hundred and forty-one oils, collages, and watercolors. Through Aug. 11. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 1 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

MARCEL BROODTHAERS (1924-76)—Of all the important artists whose influence can be felt today, Broodthaers is perhaps the least understood. This exhibition, "The Complete Prints," opens one door to understanding the artist's prescient analytic/poetic/critical work, but at the same time plunges us deeper into the necessary confusion of the Broodthaers conundrum. The logic of the show is problematic: while it makes a point of including all of Broodthaers' prints, as distinct from his multiples and books, the artist himself was constantly toying with the various categories of art and with art's relation to language. Given the impossibility of dividing Broodthaers' works into such orderly categories—included, for example, are relevant multiples—the exhibition's logic slips away at the edges; but this only serves to emphasize the strength and elusiveness of his work in general. Included in the show are some beautiful, refined pieces, which deal with an array of subjects—from authorship to anti-imperialism—that are of primary interest to younger artists some twenty years later. As might be expected, a number of the works take issue with the very idea of the multiple print and with the notion of the commodification of art. One work, for instance, which consists of a stack of a hundred and forty identical prints, is at once a multiple, a unique work of art, and an entire print edition. Through July 3. (Werner, 21 E. 67th St. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays.)

SAM FRANCIS—The "Blue Ball" paintings, from the early sixties, are beautiful, pellucid specimens that look as if they had been born yesterday in a petri dish. Francis was living in Paris when he painted these large amoeba forms, and through them you can sense that Yves Klein was the man of the hour. The "Blue Balls" are very lyrical paintings—in pastel tones against white grounds. Francis's stated intention was to "make the late Monet pure." But there's a daring, razor-sharp edge in these works that is almost certainly gratis Klein, and that hasn't recurred since. Through June 28. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays.)

ELLIOTT GREEN—A first solo show of paintings. Two years ago at this gallery, the thirty-one-year-old artist had a first show of ethereal paintings on dreamscapey themes. These new works are more ambitious and more visibly effortful, but they do have the same power to charm. They have hothouse-flower complexions yet look fresh, and they seem very young. Green's delicately painted abstract grounds reflect rather playfully the mock-photochemical brushstrokes of painters such as Gerhard Richter and David Reed. His colors, and his little figurative anecdotes and incidents, are reminiscent of Francesco Clemente and Michael Byron. Green isn't saying a whole lot yet, but in his best paintings—for instance, a bridal figure against a pinkish grid, holding a pyramid of cherries, or a Duchampian factory-theme montage featuring a pot-bellied stove—deft technique is animated by a lovely imagination. Through July 3. (Hirschl & Adler Modern, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays.)

ROBERT MOTHERWELL—An interestingly offbeat show of paintings and drawings, large and small—made between 1958 and the present—that have been hung atelier-style in order to evoke the artist's studio, in Connecticut. It is difficult to guess the dates of Motherwell's works just by looking. Two new paintings, craggily grand and in his most characteristic blacks and browns, seem almost exactly like vintage Motherwells; they are, perhaps, a little tighter and sharper around the edges. Through June 28. (Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays.)

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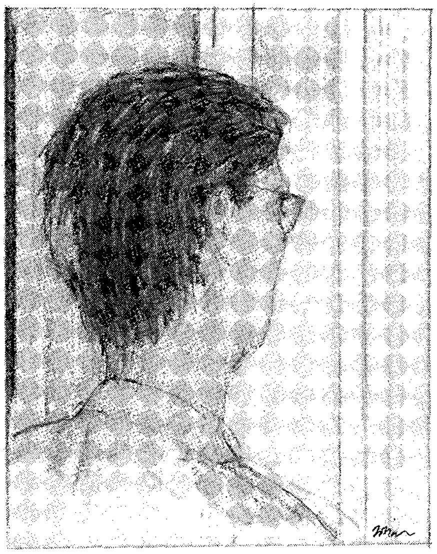

Self-portrait by Richard Tobias

KENNETH NOLAND—A show of new paintings that is a mixed bag. Each work consists of several loosely connected curved-edge canvases, flatly painted in various monochromes and edged in Plexiglas of contrasting colors. Some are overstudied and depressed, but others are quite engaging, like lyrical versions of Ellsworth Kellys, and have an unexpected defiance. Through June 29. (Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. Open Mondays.)

SHORT LIST—**BRICE MARDEN,** Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St. (through June 28); **SALLY SCUFFLE,** Mark Milliken, 1200 Madison Ave., at 87th St. (open Mondays, through June 29).

GALLERIES—57TH STREET AREA

MIRALDA—As a companion to his full-size dress for the Statue of Liberty, currently on display at the World Financial Center, in Battery Park City, this Spanish artist is exhibiting what must be the world's largest belt—a hundred and ninety-four feet long. Hanging from the ceiling at hip height in a continuous snaking loop, the belt is made of leather dyed in flashy high-fashion colors—fuchsia, electric blue, mustard, and basic black—and has the names of various American and Spanish foods etched into it. The buckle consists of a map—with horns—of the New World, whose cultural capital, New York, has been stabbed with banderillas. The piece suggests a variety of passionate activities—like bullfighting, colonization, and sexual conquest—with great style and wit. Also on display are several irrepressibly naughty collages of projects for surrealistic urban spectacles, such as a street parade featuring a giant lace slip and stockings. Through July 3. (Holly Solomon, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Open Mondays.)

"BROADWAY! 125 YEARS OF MUSICAL THEATRE"—A large assortment of objects—including paintings, posters, scripts, models, sheet music, and memorabilia—from more than seventy-five productions that have bowed on the Great White Way. Among the highlights is a silver tray that was presented to George Gershwin, engraved with the signatures of a hundred and forty-three theatre luminaries. All the works are from the collection of the Museum of the City of New York. Through July 13. (I.B.M. Gallery of Science and Art, Madison Ave. at 56th St.)

SHORT LIST—**HANNO AHRENS** and **JAMES BARSNESS,** Frumkin-Adams, 50 W. 57th St. (open Mondays, closed Saturdays, through June 28); **VALENTINA DU BASKY** and **LYNNE FREHM,** Ruth Siegel, 24 W. 57th St. (through June 29); **GRÉGOIRE MÜLLER,** McCoy, 41 E. 57th St. (open Mondays, closed Saturdays, through July 12); **BERNARDA BRYSON SHAHN,** Midtown-Payson, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. (open Mondays, closed Saturdays, through July 26); **ANNE TRUITT,** Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St. (open Mondays, closed Saturdays, through June 28).

GALLERIES—SoHo

FERNANDO MELANI (1907-85)—Although he was inspired by Mondrian and can be seen as a precursor of minimalism and Arte Povera, the eccentric Melani considered his work the embodiment of theoretical physics and did not want it to be limited by the label "art." This exhibition—the first major one outside Melani's native Pistoia—presents remarkably consistent work spanning the last four decades of his life. Mondrian's inspiration is everywhere: from a finely balanced painted construction from 1959, entitled "Venus and Mondrian," to the multipanel "Project for a Global Reading," from 1976, which consists of a wall of monochrome panels in innumerable sizes and colors. Through June 29. (Ala, 560 Broadway.)

CLAUDE SIMARD—This artist almost succeeds in creating a haunting show with poetic resonance. But several cheap, theatrical tricks—like a group of life-size sculptures of men in purple shrouds on wall-mounted shelves, and a fake escape hatch attached to the ceiling—push the exhibit into the realm of the obvious and pretentious. Through July 3. (Shainman, 560 Broadway.)

RICHARD TOBIAS—Paintings from 1983 to the present. This very subtle artist brings a strange, febrile lyricism to otherwise cool, precise, geometric compositions, thereby striking a balance of mood and temperature that sometimes recalls late Kandinsky. Tobias's most recent abstractions include buoyant, biomorphic shapes against gridded white grounds, and these further suggest the flowering into boldness of a reticent temperament. The works are crisp, funny, and warm-to-hot. Through July 12. (Brooke Alexander, 59 Wooster St. Open Wednesdays until 8.)

FRANZ WEST AND MATHIS ESTERHAZY—A strange, still, and beautiful show of steel implements, welded and forged, of somewhat arcane function. The title of the group, "Pis Aller," refers to the centuries-old corner braces that were used in Europe to prevent men from urinating in public places. (Some still exist.) There are two of these devices here, and two each of the show's other objects: sieves, coin boxes, and hurdles, for example. All are presented on platforms, to be scrutinized as sculptures. The use of the double image—implying both mate and collaborator—gives a psychological complexion to the show. Through June 28. (Wingate, 578 Broadway.)

GILBERTO ZORIO—This Arte Povera artist is half mystic, half trickster. In the main gallery is a kayak-shaped piece with long copper rods and a bulbous flask filled with a copper sulfide composition. It is suspended by metal supports that aggressively stab the walls like javelins; it delineates its space with the theatrical grace of baroque architecture. There are also two metal star shapes, with similar supports. At regular intervals, a timer goes off and the sculptures start shaking, and loud scraping, whistling sounds pierce the space with the urgency of a Richard Foreman production. Upstairs, there are several fine drawings and a beautifully attenuated Dionysian bong. Its flask is filled with vodka, which a tall, hearty person could drink by sucking on the suspended end of a copper tube. Through July 27. (SteinGladstone, 99 Wooster St.)

"SWEET DREAMS"—A smart, highly entertaining show of mixed-media works having to do with storybook animals—depicted or stuffed, to ends formal, ecological, nostalgic, or perverse—by established artists such as Eric Bainbridge, Steve Gianakos, Ellen Phelan, Annette Messager, Charlemagne Palestine, and William Wegman, as well as by newcomers such as Brian Conley, Mark Dion, and Charles LeDray (for whom Mike Kelley is the implicit éminence grise). Bainbridge does an F. A. O. Schwarz homage to Brancusi; Phelan's "Playful Kitten II" is a self-portrait-as-adorable-pussycat; Palestine's crazed "McWee McPhee McZee" is an altarpiece to childhood, featuring three big, overpainted stuffed-toy goats and a rear-view mirror; LeDray's piece consists of four La

REFUGE

As it stretches southward from the well-paved Shea Stadium region, Flushing Meadows Park grows wilder and wilder, and near its southernmost tip, along the shores of a peaceful body of water called Willow Lake, lies a new wildlife sanctuary. The swampy two-acre site was carved into four baseball fields in 1964, but athletes rarely had much fun there, because the outfields were so often muddy; by 1985, the site had degenerated into a rusty haven for abandoned cars. Last month, it was christened the Samuel J. and Ethel LeFrak Meadow, in honor of the real-estate moguls who built many of the apartment towers nearby and who paid for the meadow's rejuvenation. To shield the meadow's inhabitants from noise, the Parks Department has planted oak, viburnum, sweet gum, maple, and dogwood trees at the edge of the Van Wyck Expressway, which runs alongside the meadow for half a mile. The department also removed yards of asphalt paths and stretches of baseball-diamond clay and installed stands of daisies and black-eyed Susans, which now mingle comfortably with native thistles, cattails, and grasses.

So far, the meadow has attracted birds ranging from modest warblers and killdeers to regal herons and ibis, as well as two families of muskrat. In the centers of the two dampest, densest patches of vegetation, these water-loving rodents have erected wood-chip structures that look like miniature versions of the homes of Iroquois Indians. A good hundred feet of swamp separates the two huts, so the muskrat clans can keep out of each other's fur.

Brea tar-dipped Teddy bears, with cubes of sugar, in cereal bowls. The show is a must for the child within you who wants to keep up with current art. Through June 29. (Toll, 146 Greene St.)

"THE THIRD RAIL"—Urban anxiety has been a recurring theme recently, and this group show attempts to reveal what the new Harings and Holzers are up to. Works here are made of such functional urban materials as nightsticks, apartment-door peepholes, metal escape hatches, and a bulletproof ticket window. The show includes a lot of work well installed in a small space, but, despite noble intentions, most of it lacks depth and, curiously, bite. Through July 12. (Lee, 588 Broadway.)

GROUP SHOW—Recent works by three very different artists from this gallery. Ashley Bickerton is trying very hard, but his new piece—an incense-burning shrine dealing with labor, immigration, and survival—doesn't work. Terry Winters' new paintings on paper of skeletal body parts seem deliberately less sensual than usual, and somewhat more interesting. Gilberto Zorio is represented by two eccentrically visionary sculptures of the sort he currently has on view at SteinGladstone. Through June 29. (Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway.)

SHORT LIST—**KELYNN Z. ALDER,** Australia Gallery, 98 Greene St. (through June 29); **GARY BROTMEYER,** Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. (through June 29); **JAIME DAVIDOVICH,** Exit Art, 578 Broadway (through July 13); **NANCY DAVIDSON** and **STEVEN DICILLO,** Pearl, 420 West Broadway (through July 10); **PAUL ÉTIENNE LINCOLN,** Burgin, 130 Prince St. (through June 29); **DAVID MORENO** and **RAYMOND PETTIBON,** Feature, 484 Broome St. (through July 6); **DAVID WEINRIB,** Steinbaum, 132 Greene St. (through July 20).

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PHOTOGRAPHY

THE International Center of Photography Midtown is exhibiting some of the photographs Brian Weil has made in response to the AIDS epidemic. Weil is not only serious and well-intentioned but also highly conscious of the complexities of his subject and its representation. His work is particularly revealing because he takes portraits of individuals, not of "a disease"; he may show us ways in which AIDS affects people's lives, but he isn't satisfied with producing mere visual or social clichés. His images are not sensationalist, voyeuristic, or exploitative. When we look at Weil's photographs, whether they're of people with AIDS or whether they relate to issues surrounding the spread of the virus, we are struck by his sensitivity to the enormity of the subject. This is evident in the range of pictures he has taken, in their geographical scope, and in the work's tentative quality. Weil took these pictures because he felt he had to do something about AIDS; so, in addition to other kinds of work he has done with those who have AIDS, he has recorded in his photography the power of people fighting for life. (Weil also has a show of photographs at Lorence-Monk, 568 Broadway, through June 29.)

JAMES CASEBERE—Resonant new photographs of the artist's own architectural sculptures, displayed both in large black-and-white prints and on huge light boxes. Casebere has worked in this vein before, with highly original results; his combination of sculpture and photography has none of the didacticism one often finds in multimedia art. The work displays a graceful integration of vocabularies—a delicate juggling of the concrete and the imagined. Although the models themselves are all Casebere's conceptions, they are informed by architectural history; the combination of reality, imagination, and "voice" makes for imagery that has a postmodern poetic sense. Through July 3. (Klein, 594 Broadway. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays.)

"MUSIC 1930-90"—Portraits of musicians, from Billie Holliday to Jane's Addiction, by such artists as Philippe Halsman, Horst, Norman Seeff, Laura Levine, and Phil Stern. Through July 9. (Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway.)

GROUP SHOW—A diverse and absorbing group of pictures, ranging through the history of photography and compiled with children in mind. There are terrific Weegees; several Lartigues, charming as always; a hysterical Doisneau, on the theme of boredom in school; exceptional animal portraits by James Balog, who can be trite and technically showy; and many other works of well-known photographers, as well as some surprises. Some of the pictures include children, such as an 1862 photograph by Lewis Carroll of Alice as a beggar girl, but others relate to children in less literal ways. There are cloud pictures, moon pictures, and "puzzle pictures," and images that make you wonder how they were done, such as a photograph by André Kertész of a broken glass negative, or a shot by John Loengard of a miniature village in which a real cat dwarfs the minuscule inhabitants. If only more exhibitions for adults were this engaging! Through July 31. (Danziger, 415 West Broadway. Closed Saturdays.)

SHORT LIST—**TINA BARNEY**, Borden, 560 Broadway (closed Saturdays, through July 12); **JOHN FLATTAU**, Witkin, 415 West Broadway (through June 29); **TEUN HOCKS**, P.P.O.W, 532 Broadway (through June 29); **KOICHIRO KURITA**, Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. (through June 29); **LAURIE LAMBRECHT**, Plumb, 81 Greene St. (through July 25); **THOMAS TULIS**, Frumkin-Adams, 50 W. 57th St. (through June 28); **BRIAN WEIL** and **PAUL ICKOVIC**, International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. (open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8; through July 21); **JOEL-PETER WITKIN**, Pace-MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. (through June 29).

MUSIC

IT has occurred to more than one musician, as we all brace ourselves for more Mozart than is fit to consume at a season's sitting, that this anniversary year belongs more legitimately to Giacomo Meyerbeer, who was *born* in 1791. But don't even think about checking the schedules! This once-important composer has been rejected by posterity about as decisively as can be; no one else has had such thorough, sustained exposure in the world's opera houses of his time and yet left so little trace a century later. But during the summer concert lull we get a lot of good record-listening done, and we have recently come across a bit of Meyerbeer—a stunner—hitherto unknown to us.

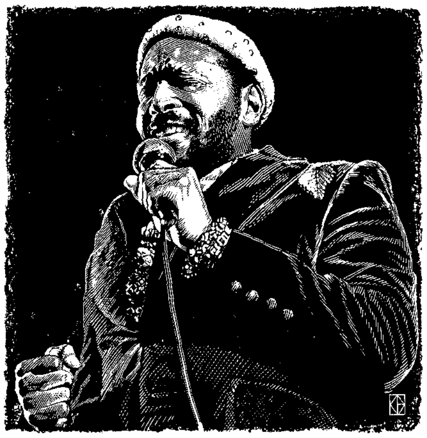
The Coronation March from "Le Prophète" could with every justification be called banal. Its melody is obvious and regular; its harmonies are impoverished; its fanfares and antiphonal effects do not surpass what might be expected of any journeyman composing for high-school-band festivals. We do not recall that the march had any effect when the Metropolitan revived "Le Prophète" for Marilyn Horne fourteen years ago. (Was it even played?) But oh, what an effect the New York Philharmonic achieved with it on January 15, 1929, in Carnegie Hall, when Willem Mengelberg conducted a session for Victor Records. What suave brio, what dapper molding of the big tune by the violins and then by the superb first trumpeter, what confidently unexaggerated rhythm! We had never paid the least attention to this march before, but now we are quite sure Verdi had it in the back of his mind when he wrote the march for the Triumphal Scene in "Aida." And we are also sure that the Philharmonic "sang" Meyerbeer as convincingly as any singer has done on a record, and that every conductor and orchestra should listen to the Mengelberg-Philharmonic records in delight and awe.

The Meyerbeer turned up on a Pearl compact disk (GEMM CD 9474, distributed by Koch International Classics). This same disk also has virile, elegant Handel; extraordinarily expressive and disciplined Bach (the famous air from the D-major suite of Johann Sebastian, arranged by Mahler, and a B-flat sinfonia of Johann Christian, arranged by Stein); precisely executed and bubbling Mozart; severe Beethoven; ruddy Mendelssohn (another march); haunting Wagner and Humperdinck; and a once-favored Saint-Saëns bonbon ("Le Rouet d'Omphale") that falls, along with the Meyerbeer, into the category of somewhat meretricious music redeemed by an execution of utter charm and adroitness.

IN TOWN—OPERA

OPERA AT THE ACADEMY—Presenting four dramatic entertainments from seventeenth-century England: John Blow's pastorale "Venus and Adonis" (directed by Christopher Alden); Matthew Locke's comic masque "Cupid and Death" (directed by, and featuring, performance artist John Kelly); and Purcell's dramatic scena "In Guilty Night" (directed by Travis Preston) and monologue "The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation" (directed by Martha Clarke). Paul Echols conducts the Academy Consort, a period-instrument ensemble. (New York Academy of Art, 419 Lafayette St. 677-8960. June 24 at 7:45, and June 25 and June 27-28 at 8.)

BOLSHOI OPERA—At the Metropolitan Opera House. June 25 at 7:30: Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin," with Nina Rautio, Elena Zaremba, Vladimir Redkin, Oleg Kulko, and Evgeny Nestorenko; conducted by Fuat Mansurov. . . . ¶ June 26 at 8: "Eugene Onegin," with Maria Gavrilova, Marina Shutova, Pavel Chernikh, Arkady Mishenkin, and Evgeny Nestorenko; Fuat Mansurov. . . . ¶ June 27 at 8: "Eugene Onegin," with Nina Rautio, Elena Zaremba, Vladimir Redki[illegible] Oleg Kulko, and Mikhail Krutikov; Fuat Mansurov. . . . ¶ June 29 at 1: "Eugene Onegin," with Irina Bikulova, Marina Shutova, Pavel Chernikh, Arkady Mishenkin, and Mikhail Krutikov; Fuat Mansurov. . . . ¶ July 28 at 8: Rimsky-Korsakov's "Mlada," with Makvala Kasrashvili, Elena Zaremba, Oleg Kulko, Gleb Nikolsky, and ballerina Nina Ananiashvili dancing the title role; Andrei Chistyakov. . . . ¶ July 29 at 8: "Mlada," with Irina Udalova, Lyudmila Nam, Nikolai Vasiliev, Boris Morozov, and ballerina Nina Ananiashvili dancing the title role; Andrei Chistyakov. . . . ¶ July 1 at 8: "Mlada," with Nina Fomina, Elena Zaremba, Arkady Mishenkin, Gleb Nikolsky, and ballerina Svetlana Slavnaya dancing the title role; Aleksander Lazarev. . . . ¶ July 2 at 8: "Mlada," with Irina Udalova, Lyudmila Nam, Arkady Mishenkin, Boris Morozov, and ballerina Svetlana Slavnaya dancing the title role; Aleksander Lazarev. . . . ¶ July 3 at 8: Tchaikovsky's "The Maid of Orleans," with Makvala Kasrashvili, Oleg Kulko, Igor Morozov, and Vyacheslev Pochapsky; Aleksander Lazarev. (362-6000. Through July 6.)



At BAM, a tribute to Marvin Gaye

REIMANN OPERA THEATRE AT N.Y.U.—The première of "The Witch Boy," composed by the late Timothy Cameron Lloyd to a libretto by his brother, David Thomas Lloyd. Fully staged, and backed up by an electronic orchestration. (New York University Theatre, 35 W. 4th St. 998-5278. June 27-29 at 8 and June 30 at 2.)

AMATO OPERA COMPANY—Presenting Mozart's "La Finta Giardiniera," or—as it's called in this production that offers arias in Italian and recitatives in English—"The Phony Gardener." David Freiman conducts. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. June 28-29 at 7:30 and June 30 at 2:30. Through July 7.)

IN TOWN—CONCERTS

CHESTER STRING QUARTET—Performing chamber music by Mozart, Dvořák, and Barber. (Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center. June 25 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

NEW MUSIC CONSORT—Claire Heldrich conducts works for percussion ensembles by Maki Ishii, Jay Alan Yim, Lucia Dlugoszewski, and Tan Dun. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. June 26 at 8. Tickets at the door on the night of the concert.)

DONALD JOYCE—The organist plays an all-Bach concert. (St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. June 26 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Bargemusic—Pianist Norman Krieger performs three études by Chopin and a nocturne by Barber; violinist Kerry McDermott and cellist Jian Wang join him for trios by Mozart and Beethoven (the "Archduke"). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061. June 27-28 at 7:30 and June 30 at 4.)

New York City Gay Men's Chorus and the Denver Women's Chorus—The Urbane East and the Wild West come together in a concert that includes music by Libby Larsen, Bernice Johnson Reagon, John David Earnest, and Leonard Bernstein. Gary Miller and Deborah Kenyon direct. (Alice Tully Hall. 362-1911. June 28-29 at 8.)

Andrew Fletcher—The organist performs music by Bach, Frank Bridge, Healey Willan, and others. (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. July 2 at 7. Admission by contribution.)

Gregg Smith Singers—Performing a program of American music. (Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center. July 2 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

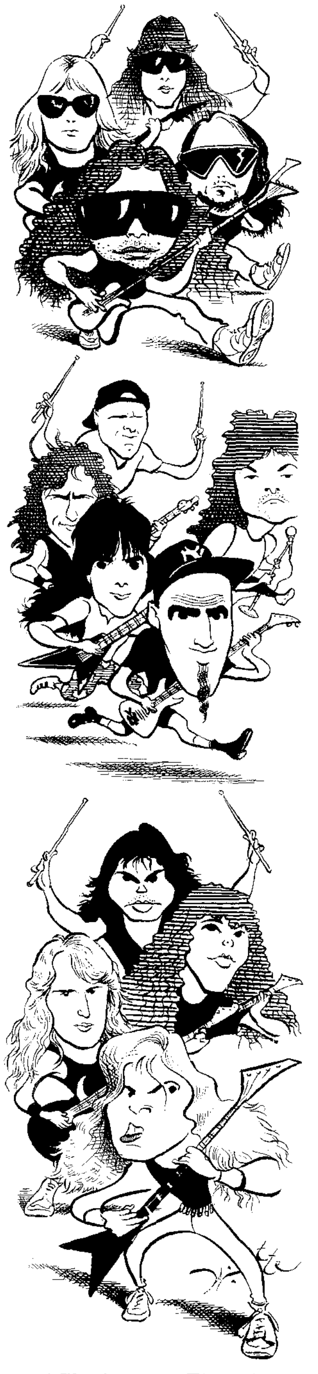
Andrew Bolotowsky—Performing a star-spangled piccolo recital, including nineteenth-century concert variations and fantasies on "Yankee Doodle," "Darling Nelly Gray," and "Marching Through Georgia." Beverly Shea assists at the piano. (Federal Hall, 26 Wall St. July 3 at 12:30. No tickets necessary.)

OUT OF TOWN

Tanglewood—Opening concerts of the festival's fifty-fourth season, which will run through Aug. 25. June 28 at 8:30 and June 30 at 2:30: Pianist Gilbert Kalish, the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, and members of the Juilliard String Quartet present two different all-Mozart programs. . . . ¶ June 29 at 8:30: Mezzo-soprano Christa Ludwig presents a *Liederabend*, with pianist Laurence Davis. . . . ¶ July 3 at 8:30: Bach's "The Art of Fugue," performed by the Juilliard String Quartet. (Lenox, Mass. For information about tickets, call 1-413 637-1940.)

Caramoor Music Festival—June 27 at 4:15: The St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, with guest harpist Susan Jolles, presents music by Beethoven, Ravel, and Anthony Davis. . . . ¶ June 28 at 9: Pianist and composer Dick Hyman teams up with the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble for improvisations and jazz-inspired compositions. . . . ¶ June 29 at 8:30: The Orchestra of St. Luke's, conductorless for the evening, performs Baroque evergreens by Bach, Telemann, and Vivaldi. . . . ¶ June 30 at 5:30: Music by Mozart, Brahms, and Dvořák, performed by the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio. (Katonah, N.Y. For information about tickets, call 1-914 232-1252.)

Cape May Music Festival—Chamber music in this Victorian resort on the Jersey shore. June 29 at 8: The Prism Quartet (which sometimes plays on saxophones and sometimes on MIDI electronic instruments) performs, among other works, Jean-Baptiste Singelée's "Premier Quatuor." This piece, dating from 1857 (a mere eleven years after Adolphe Sax patented the instrument that bears his name), holds its place in the annals of music as the first saxophone quartet. . . . ¶ June 30 at 8: The Saturday Brass performs works by Bach, Giovanni Gabrieli, and others. (Cape May, N.J.) (For information about tickets, call 1-609 884-5404.)



"Clash of the Titans": Slayer, Anthrax, and Megadeth

JAZZ / POP / ROCK
PERSONAL APPEARANCES

George Clinton and the P-Funk All-Stars—With the Brand New Heavies. (Palladium, 126 E. 14th St. 473-7171. June 25 at 8.)

Nelson—Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. June 26 at 8.

The Flirtations—La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. June 27-30 at 10.

"Clash of the Titans"—Anthrax, Slayer, and Megadeth. (Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. June 28 at 7:30.)

Toots and the Maytals—Two "Musicruise" concerts on a Circle Line boat. (Pier 81, Twelfth Ave. at 41st St. 941-1234. June 28 at 8 and 10:30; boarding starts at 7:30 and 10.)

"Blue Lights in the Basement: A Tribute to Marvin Gaye"—Performances by the Commodores, Kim Weston, the Institutional Radio Choir, and others. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100. June 30 at 3 and 8.)

NRBQ—With Maceo Parker. (South Street Seaport, Pier 16, East River at Fulton St. July 3 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

JVC Jazz Festival—Final performances of the series. June 24: At 5, Niels Lan Doky (Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall); at 8, a salute to Doc Cheatham, with Dizzy Gillespie, Harry (Sweets) Edison, and others (Town Hall); and at 8, the New Black Eagle Jazz Band and Tommy Sancton's New Orleans All-Stars (Equitable Auditorium). . . . ¶ June 25: At 5, Sammy Price (Weill Recital Hall); at 8, a tribute to Sarah Vaughan, with Roberta Flack, Shirley Horn, Florence Quivar, Bill Cosby, and others (Carnegie Hall); and at 8, the Terence Blanchard quintet and the Mark Whitfield trio (Equitable Auditorium). . . . ¶ June 26: At 5, Ellis Larkins (Weill Recital Hall); at 7:30, Tuck & Patti in a free concert (World Financial Center Plaza, Battery Park City); at 8, a celebration of Marian McPartland's "Piano Jazz," with Ms. McPartland, the Dave Brubeck trio, Marcus Roberts, and others (Avery Fisher Hall); and at 8, Howard Alden, Janice Friedman, Joey DeFrancesco, and others (Equitable Auditorium). . . . ¶ June 27: At 8, Ella Fitzgerald (Carnegie Hall); and at 8, Jon Faddis, Mulgrew Miller, Renee Rosnes, and others (Equitable Auditorium). . . . ¶ June 28: At 5, Barry Harris (Weill Recital Hall); at 7 and 11, Spyro Gyra and Bob James (Beacon Theatre); at 8, a salute to George Butler, with Nancy Wilson, Joe Williams, and Jimmy Smith (Carnegie Hall); at 8, a tribute to Dexter Gordon, with Slide Hampton, Jimmy Slyde, Bobby Watson, and others (Avery Fisher Hall); and at 8, the Roy Haynes group and the Roy Hargrove quintet (Equitable Auditorium). . . . ¶ June 29: At 7 and 11, Ray Charles and Regina Belle (Avery Fisher Hall); at 8, Ornette Coleman & Prime Time (Carnegie Hall); and at 8, the GRP All-Stars and Tania Maria (Beacon Theatre). (The phone number for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall is 247-7800; for Avery Fisher Hall, 874-2424; for Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St., 840-2824; and for the Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St., 496-7070. For tickets to concerts at the Equitable Auditorium, Seventh Ave. at 51st St., call 307-7171; also, tickets at the door on the nights of these concerts.)

Central Park SummerStage—June 26 at 7: The Neville Brothers. A benefit. . . . ¶ June 28 at 8:30: Dancers of Zaire. . . . ¶ June 29 at 3: **THE MEKONS** and **YO LA TENGO.** A show worth catching, despite the fact that there will probably be a high ratio of rock critics to humans in the audience. Rock and roll is "a can of ideological worms," according to the liner notes on a recent Mekons album, and this band from Leeds presents itself as a cross between a revolutionary commune and a seminar on itself. ("This song promotes homosexuality," go the words to one recent ditty. "It's in a pretended family relationship with the others on this record.") All of this would be pretty awful if these miraculous survivors from the days of punk didn't play such marvellous, haunting music. The industrial metropolis of Hoboken has produced Yo La Tengo (baseball Spanish for "I've Got It!"), a band that can also punk out and pluck lovely tunes, sometimes at the same time. . . . ¶ June 30 at 3: **LOS LOBOS.** This acoustic performance will look past the raucous sound of the recent R. & B.-flavored album "The Neighborhood" to the territory explored in the band's 1989 album "La Pistola y el Corazón," a heartfelt survey of traditional Mexican songs performed on guitar, fiddle, accordion, and bajo-sexto guitar. But the Angelenos in Los Lobos are anything but antiquarian; at their last acoustic performance, in Carnegie Hall, they threw in the theme from "Green Acres" as an encore, sang the Spanish blues like true journeymen, and generally had the staid old joint jumping to the hot-pepper sound of their intensely rhythmic *canciones*. (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. No tickets necessary, except for the Neville Brothers benefit; for tickets to that concert, call 307-7171. For rain-date information, call 360-2777.)

Jones Beach Theatre—June 29 at 8: Chicago, with the Triplets. . . . ¶ June 30 at 8: Julio Iglesias. . . . ¶ July 3 at 7:30: David Lee Roth. (1-516 221-1000.)

SPORTS

HOME TEAMS

Mets—Vs. the Montreal Expos, June 25-26 at 7:40 and June 27 at 1:40. . . . ¶ Vs. the Philadelphia Phillies, June 28 at 7:40, June 29 at 7:10, and June 30 at 1:40.

Yankees—Vs. the Cleveland Indians, July 1-3 at 7:30.

(The Mets play at Shea Stadium, 1-718 507-8499, and the Yankees play at Yankee Stadium, 293-6000.)

RACING

Horses—At Belmont: Daily, except Tuesdays, at 1. . . . At Monmouth Park, Oceanport, N.J.: Weekdays, except Mondays and Thursdays, at 1:05. . . . At Atlantic City Race Course: Wednesdays through Saturdays at 7:15. . . . **TROTTING** at Yonkers Raceway: Weeknights at 8, and Tuesdays at 1. . . . At the Meadowlands: Weeknights at 7:30. . . . At Saratoga Raceway, Saratoga Springs: Wednesdays through Saturdays at 7:45.

Yachts—The Liberty Cup races will be June 27-30 in New York Harbor.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

City Parties—Caribbean Cultural Heritage week culminates in a daylong party in Prospect Park, with reggae and calypso bands, limbo dancers, and Caribbean food. (June 30, starting at noon.) . . . ¶ Gay Pride Week ends with the traditional Heritage of Pride parade, which starts at Columbus Circle and ends downtown, on Hudson Street. (June 30, starting at 12:30 P.M.)

Swing Dancing—In Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center. June 26: Tito Puente. . . . ¶ June 27: Panama Francis and his Savoy Sultans. . . . ¶ June 28: The Roy Gerson Swing Septet. . . . ¶ June 29: Illinois Jacquet. . . . ¶ July 3: Rosco Gordon and Killing Floor. (Evenings at 8:15. Tickets on the nights of the events.)

Walks—June 29 at 1: A hike around the Portuguese neighborhoods of Newark, with a rewarding lunch at the end. For reservations, call 265-2663. . . . ¶ June 30 at 1: A stroll through Beekman Place and Sutton Place. For reservations, call 265-2663. . . . ¶ June 30 at 2: A walk that transcends other walks: participants bring along—and read aloud—their favorite poems. Meets at Central Park West and 100th St.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

At Lincoln Plaza, Julie Delpy and Marco Hofschneider in "Europa Europa"

EAST SIDE

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St. (995-2000)
Theatre 1: "Bright Angel" (directed by Michael Field), with Dermot Mulroney and Lili Taylor.
Theatre 2: "The Comfort of Strangers" (†).
Theatre 3: "La Femme Nikita" (†).
Theatre 4: Through June 27: "An Angel at My Table" (†). From June 28: "The Reflecting Skin" (Philip Ridley), with Lindsay Duncan.
Theatre 5: "Drowning by Numbers" (Peter Greenaway).
Theatre 6: "Tatie Danielle" (Etienne Chatiliez, in French), with Tsilla Chelton.

Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171)
June 24: Theatre closed.
June 25-27: "Hiroshima, Mon Amour" (1959, Alain Resnais; in French), with Emmanuèle Riva and Eiji Okada; and "Two or Three Things I Know About Her" (1967, Jean-Luc Godard; in French), with Marina Vlady.
June 28-30: The 1991 Documentary Festival of New York.
July 1: Theatre closed.
July 2-3: "Hiroshima, Mon Amour"; and "Au Hasard, Balthazar" (†).

Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 36 E. 8th. (477-6600)
Theatre 1: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (†).
Theatre 2: Through July 2: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (†). From July 3: "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" (James Cameron), with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Linda Hamilton.
Theatre 3: "Dying Young" (Joel Schumacher), with Julia Roberts.

Loews Village Theatre VII, 3rd Ave. at 11th. (982-0400)
Theatre 1: "Thelma & Louise" (†).
Theatre 2: "City Slickers" (†).
Theatre 3: "City Slickers" (†).
Theatre 4: "Don't Tell Mom the Babysitter's Dead" (Stephen Herek).
Theatre 5: "Truth or Dare" (†).
Theatre 6: "Alice" (†).
Theatre 7: "Thelma & Louise" (†).

Cinema Village 12th Street, 22 E. 12th. (924-3363)
"Eating" (†).

Village East Cinemas, 2nd Ave. at 12th. (529-6799)
Theatre 1: "Opening Night" (1977, John Cassavetes), with Gena Rowlands, Ben Gazzara, Joan Blondell, and Cassavetes.
Theatre 2: "What About Bob?" (†).
Theatre 3: "Ju Dou" (†).
Theatre 4: "Dark Obsession" (Nicholas Broomfield), with Gabriel Byrne and Amanda Donohoe.
Theatre 5: "The Rocketeer" (Joe Johnston), with Bill Campbell, Alan Arkin, and Jennifer Connelly.

THE MOVIE HOUSES

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	1	2	3			

FILMS ACCOMPANIED BY A DAGGER ARE DESCRIBED IN THE "IN BRIEF" SECTION, STARTING ON PAGE 16.

Theatre 6: "Straight Out of Brooklyn" (Matty Rich).
Theatre 7: "Impromptu" (†).

Cinema Village 3rd Avenue, between 12th and 13th. (505-7320)
Through June 27: (Separate admissions) "Noir et Blanc" (Claire Devers); and "Perfectly Normal" (†).
From June 28: "Extramuros" (Miguel Picazo, in Spanish).

Loews 19th Street East 6, B'way at 19th. (260-8000)
Theatre 1: "Hangin' with the Homeboys" (Joseph Vasquez).
Theatre 2: "Soapdish" (†).
Theatre 3: "Impromptu" (†).
Theatre 4: "Hudson Hawk" (†).
Theatre 5: Through July 2: "Soapdish" (†). From July 3: "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" (James Cameron), with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Linda Hamilton.
Theatre 6: Through June 27: "Kickboxer 2" (Albert Pyun), with Sasha Mitchell. From June 28: "The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear" (David Zucker), with Leslie Nielsen.

Gramercy, Lexington at 23rd. (475-1600)
"FX2—The Deadly Art of Illusion" (Richard Franklin), with Bryan Brown and Brian Dennehy.

Bay Cinema, 2nd Ave. at 32nd. (679-0160)
"Dying Young" (Joel Schumacher), with Julia Roberts and Campbell Scott.

Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th. (689-6548)
Theatre 1: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (†).
Theatre 2: "Jungle Fever" (†).
Theatre 3: "The Rocketeer" (Joe Johnston), with Bill Campbell.
Theatre 4: "The Rocketeer."

Loews 34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th. (532-5544)
Theatre 1: Through June 27: "Soapdish" (†). From June 28: "The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear" (David Zucker).
Theatre 2: "City Slickers" (†).
Theatre 3: "Thelma & Louise" (†).

34th St. East, 241 E. 34th. (683-0255)
"Backdraft" (†).

Eastside Cinema, 3rd Ave. at 55th. (755-3020)
Through June 27: "Ju Dou" (†).
From June 28: "The Reflecting Skin" (Philip Ridley), with Lindsay Duncan.

Sutton I and 2, 3rd Ave. at 57th. (759-1411)
Theatre 1: "The Rocketeer" (Joe Johnston), with Bill Campbell, Alan Arkin, and Jennifer Connelly.
Theatre 2: "The Rocketeer."

Gotham Cinema, 3rd Ave. at 58th. (759-2262)
"Dying Young" (Joel Schumacher), with Julia Roberts and Campbell Scott.

Plaza, 42 E. 58th. (355-3320)
"Straight Out of Brooklyn" (Matty Rich).

Manhattan Twin, 3rd Ave. at 59th. (935-6420)
Theatre 1: "Jungle Fever" (†).
Theatre 2: "Jungle Fever" (†).

59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th. (759-4630)
(Matinées only) "Home Alone" (Chris Columbus), with Macaulay Culkin; and (evenings only) "Bright Angel" (Michael Field), with Dermot Mulroney.

Baronet and Coronet, 3rd Ave. at 59th. (355-1663)
Theatre 1: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (†).
Theatre 2: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (†).

Cinema I, Cinema II, and Cinema 3rd Avenue, 3rd Ave. at 60th. (753-6022)
Theatre 1: "What About Bob?" (†).
Theatre 2: "Dark Obsession" (Nicholas Broomfield), with Gabriel Byrne and Amanda Donohoe.
Theatre 3: "Every Other Weekend" (Nicole Garcia, in French), with Nathalie Baye.

Gemini I and 2, 2nd Ave. at 64th. (832-1670)
Theatre 1: "Don't Tell Mom the Babysitter's Dead" (Stephen Herek).
Theatre 2: Through July 2: "Truth or Dare" (†). From July 3: "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" (James Cameron), with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Linda Hamilton.

Beekman, 2nd Ave. at 66th. (737-2622)
"Backdraft" (†).

Loews New York Twin, 2nd Ave. at 67th. (744-7339)
Theatre 1: Through June 27: "Thelma & Louise" (†). From June 28: "The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear" (David Zucker), with Leslie Nielsen.
Theatre 2: "City Slickers" (†).

68th St. Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 68th. (734-0302)
Through June 27: "The Object of Beauty" (Michael Lindsay-Hogg).
From June 28: "The Miracle" (Neil Jordan), with Beverly D'Angelo and Donal McCann.

Loews Tower East, 3rd Ave. at 71st. (879-1313)
"Soapdish" (†).

U. A. East, 1st Ave. at 85th. (249-5100)
Through June 27: (Matinées only) "Home Alone" (Chris Columbus); and (evenings only) "Truth or Dare" (†).
From June 28: "The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear" (David Zucker), with Leslie Nielsen.

Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th. (534-1880)
Theatre 1: "Jungle Fever" (†).
Theatre 2: "Backdraft" (†).

86th Street East Twin, 3rd Ave. at 86th. (249-1144)
Theatre 1: "The Rocketeer" (Joe Johnston), with Bill Campbell.
Theatre 2: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (†).

WEST SIDE

Film Forum, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)
Theatre 1: Through July 2: "The Runner" (1985, directed by Amir Naderi; in Farsi). From July 3: "Marquis" (1989, Henri Xhonneux; in French).
Theatre 2: See listings under Revival Houses.
Theatre 3: "Paris Is Burning" (†).

Bleecker Movie House, 144 Bleecker St. (807-9205)
Theatre 1: "The Golden Boat" (Raul Ruiz).
Theatre 2: "Forever Activists—Stories from the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade" (Judith Montell), a documentary.

Waverly I and 2, 6th Ave. at 3rd. (929-8037)
Theatre 1: "Backdraft" (†).
Theatre 2: "Jungle Fever" (†).

8th St. Playhouse, 52 W. 8th. (674-6515)
"The Nasty Girl" (Michael Verhoeven, in German), with Lena Stolze.

Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th. (929-3350)
Theatre 1: "Soapdish" (†).
Theatre 2: Through June 27: (Matinées only) "Home Alone" (Chris Columbus), with Macaulay Culkin; and (evenings only) "Only the Lonely" (Chris Columbus), with John Candy, Maureen O'Hara, and Ally Sheedy. From June 28: "The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear" (David Zucker), with Leslie Nielsen.

Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th. (255-8800)
Theatre 1: "Switch" (Blake Edwards), with Ellen Barkin and Jimmy Smits.
Theatre 2: "Daddy Nostalgia" (Bertrand Tavernier; in English and French).
Theatre 3: "Alice" (†).
Theatre 4: "The Silence of the Lambs" (Jonathan Demme), with Jodie Foster and Anthony Hopkins.

Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd. (691-4744)
Theatre 1: "City Slickers" (†).
Theatre 2: "Dying Young" (Joel Schumacher), with Julia Roberts.
Theatre 3: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (†).
Theatre 4: "Jungle Fever" (†).
Theatre 5: "City Slickers" (†).
Theatre 6: "Jungle Fever" (†).
Theatre 7: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (†).
Theatre 8: "Backdraft" (†).
Theatre 9: "Dying Young."

23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd. (989-0060)
Theatre 1: (Separate admissions) "Don't Tell Mom the Babysitter's Dead" (Stephen Herek); and "What About Bob?" (†).

Theatre 2: (Matinées only) "Home Alone" (Chris Columbus), with Macaulay Culkin; and (evenings only) "Truth or Dare" (†).
Theatre 3: "The Rocketeer" (Joe Johnston), with Bill Campbell, Alan Arkin, and Jennifer Connelly.

Guild, 33 W. 50th. (757-2406)
"Thelma & Louise" (†).

Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between 8th and 9th Aves. (246-1583)
Theatre 1: "Truth or Dare" (†).
Theatre 2: "Ju Dou" (†).
Theatre 3: "Jungle Fever" (†).
Theatre 4: "Drop Dead Fred" (Ate de Jong).
Theatre 5: "Spartacus" (1960, Stanley Kubrick), with Kirk Douglas.
Theatre 6: "Impromptu" (†).

Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th. (765-7600)
"Dying Young" (Joel Schumacher), with Julia Roberts and Campbell Scott.

Loews Festival, 6 W. 57th. (307-7856)
"Citizen Kane" (1941, Orson Welles), with Welles, Joseph Cotten, Dorothy Comingore, Agnes Moorehead, and Everett Sloane.

57th St. Playhouse, 110 W. 57th. (581-7360)
"Impromptu" (†).

Carnegie Hall Cinemas, 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th. (265-2520)
Theatre 1: "Tatie Danielle" (Etienne Chatiliez, in French), with Tsilla Chelton.
Theatre 2: "La Femme Nikita" (†).

Loews Fine Arts, 4 W. 58th. (980-5656)
"My Father's Glory" (Yves Robert, in French), with Julien Ciamaca.

Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th. (752-5959)
"Truly, Madly, Deeply" (†).

Loews Paramount, B'way at 61st. (247-5070)
"Soapdish" (†).

62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd. (265-7466)
"What About Bob?" (†).

Lincoln Plaza 1, 2, and 3, B'way at 63rd. (757-2280)
Theatre 1: "Everybody's Fine" (Giuseppe Tornatore, in Italian), with Marcello Mastroianni.
Theatre 2: Through June 27: "Cinema Paradiso" (Tornatore, in Italian), with Philippe Noiret and Salvatore Cascio. From June 28: "Europa Europa" (†).
Theatre 3: "A Paper Wedding" (Michel Brault, in French), with Geneviève Bujold.

Regency, B'way at 67th. (724-3700)
"Dying Young" (Joel Schumacher), with Julia Roberts and Campbell Scott.

Loews 84th Street Sixplex, B'way at 84th. (877-3600)
Theatre 1: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (†).
Theatre 2: "City Slickers" (†).
Theatre 3: "Thelma & Louise" (†).
Theatre 4: "The Rocketeer" (Joe Johnston), with Bill Campbell, Alan Arkin, and Jennifer Connelly.
Theatre 5: Through July 2: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (†). From July 3: "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" (James Cameron), with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Linda Hamilton.
Theatre 6: Through June 27: "City Slickers" (†). From June 28: "The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear" (David Zucker), with Leslie Nielsen.

Metro Cinema 1 and 2, B'way at 99th. (222-1200)
Theatre 1: "Jungle Fever" (†).
Theatre 2: "Jungle Fever" (†).

Olympia I and II, B'way at 107th. (865-8128)
Theatre 1: "Backdraft" (†).
Theatre 2: (Matinées only) "Home Alone" (Chris Columbus), with Macaulay Culkin; and (evenings only) "Kickboxer 2" (Albert Pyun), with Sasha Mitchell.

TIMES SQUARE AREA

Criterion Center, B'way at 44th. (354-0900)
Theatre 1: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (†).
Theatre 2: (Matinées only) "Home Alone" (directed by Chris Columbus), with Macaulay Culkin; and (evenings only) "Hudson Hawk" (†).
Theatre 3: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves." (†).
Theatre 4: "Kickboxer 2" (Albert Pyun), with Sasha Mitchell.
Theatre 5: "House of Justice."
Theatre 6: Through July 2: "Kickboxer 2." From July 3: "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" (James Cameron), with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Linda Hamilton.

Embassy 1, B'way at 46th. (302-0494)
"The Rocketeer" (Joe Johnston), with Bill Campbell, Alan Arkin, and Jennifer Connelly.

Embassy 2, 3, and 4, 7th Ave. at 47th. (730-7262)
Theatre 1: Through June 27: "Straight Out of Brooklyn" (Matty Rich). From June 28: "The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear" (David Zucker), with Leslie Nielsen.
Theatre 2: Through June 27: "FX2—The Deadly Art of Illusion" (Richard Franklin), with Bryan Brown and Brian Dennehy. From June 28: "The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear."
Theatre 3: "What About Bob?" (†).

Loews Astor Plaza, 44th St. at B'way. (869-8340)
"City Slickers" (†).

National Twin, B'way at 44th. (869-0950)
Theatre 1: "Jungle Fever" (†).
Theatre 2: "Jungle Fever" (†).

West Side Cinema 1 and 2, 7th Ave. at 48th. (398-1720)
Theatre 1: "Don't Tell Mom the Babysitter's Dead" (Stephen Herek).
Theatre 2: "A Rage in Harlem" (Bill Duke), with Forest Whitaker, Gregory Hines, Robin Givens, and Danny Glover.

REVIVAL HOUSES

Biograph Cinema, 225 W. 57th. (582-4582)
June 24-29: "The Adventures of Robin Hood" (directed by Michael Curtiz and William Keighley), with Olivia de Havilland, Errol Flynn, Alan Hale, Ian Hunter, Basil Rathbone, and Claude Rains; and "Robin and Marian" (1976, directed by Richard Lester), with Sean Connery, Audrey Hepburn, Robert Shaw, Nicol Williamson, and Richard Harris.
June 30-July 3: "2001: A Space Odyssey" (†); and "2010" (1984, Peter Hyams), with Roy Scheider.

Film Forum 2, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)
June 24: "Passing Through" (1977, Larry Clark); and "Cry of Jazz" (1959, Edward Bland).
June 25: "Thelonious Monk: Straight No Chaser" (1990, Charlotte Zwerin), a documentary; and "The Last of the Blue Devils" (1980, Bruce Ricker), a documentary about Kansas City jazz musicians Count Basie, Jay McShann, and Joe Turner.
June 26: "Mingus" (1968, Thomas Reichman), the life and times of Charles Mingus; and "All Night Long" (1962, Basil Rearden), with Patrick McGoohan, Richard Attenborough, Keith Michell, and Betsy Blair.
June 27-28: "Let's Get Lost" (†); and "Private Hell 36" (1954, Donald Siegel), with Ida Lupino, Steve Cochran, Dean Jagger, and Howard Duff.
June 29: "Sweet Love, Bitter" (1967, Herbert Danska), with Dick Gregory, Don Murray, Diane Varsi, and Robert Hooks; and "The Cool World" (†).
June 30: "The Cameraman" (1928, Edward Sedgwick; silent), with Buster Keaton. Live jazz music by Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks.
July 1: "Bix" (1981, Brigitte Berman); and "Young Man with a Horn" (1950, Michael Curtiz), with Kirk Douglas and Lauren Bacall.
July 2: "Jazzman" (1984, Karen Shakhnarazov; in Russian); and "King of the Gypsies" (1978, Frank Pierson), with Sterling Hayden, Shelley Winters, Susan Sarandon, Judd Hirsch, Brooke Shields, Eric Roberts, and Annie Potts.
July 3: "Leadbelly" (1976, Gordon Parks), with Roger E. Mosley; and "Mississippi Blues" (1983, Bertrand Tavernier and Robert Parrish; in French and English), a documentary.

Newman Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171)
June 24: Theatre closed.
June 25-26: "Nostalghia" (1984, Andrei Tarkovsky; in Italian), with Erland Josephson; and "Himatsuri" (1985, Mitsuo Yanagimachi; in Japanese).
June 27: "Brief Encounter" (1946, David Lean), with Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard; and "Summertime" (1955, Lean), with Katharine Hepburn, Rossano Brazzi, Isa Miranda, and Darren McGavin.
June 28-29: "Richard III" (†); and "Juliet of the Spirits" (1965, Federico Fellini; in Italian), with Giulietta Masina.
June 30: "To Be or Not to Be" (†); and "The Lady Vanishes" (1938; Alfred Hitchcock), with Dame May Whitty, Margaret Lockwood, Michael Redgrave, Paul Lukas, and Cecil Parker.
July 1: Theatre closed.
July 2-3: "Sugarbaby" (1985; Percy Adlon; in German); and "Ariel" (1989, Aki Kaurismaki).

Bette Davis always downplayed her sex appeal, saying she became famous because of brains and talent. But in her prime—from 1934 to 1950—she could be galvanizingly sensual. When she starred as the cockney waitress Mildred in the 1934 version of Somerset Maugham's "Of Human Bondage" (playing at Theatre 80 St. Marks, July 2), Life *magazine called her performance "probably the best ever recorded on screen by a U.S. actress." Her Mildred is unlike any other antiheroine. This user and emotional bruiser has a vindictiveness that shrivels men into husks. Yet there's nothing traditionally vampish or femme fatale-ish about her. She's a shrewd, ignorant slut who deploys her limited arsenal of weapons—a vain, arrogant allure and a jeering instinct for the jugular—to conquer the opposite sex. No one who sees the film can forget the crazy violence in her voice when she tells the gentle, clubfooted intellectual played by Leslie Howard, "After you kissed me, I always wiped my mouth!"*

Sixteen years later, following a string of late-forties Davis duds, Joseph L. Mankiewicz both revived and capped her career by casting her as Margo Channing, the Broadway diva supreme, in "All About Eve" (playing at Theatre 80 St. Marks, on June 28-29). *Everything Davis had done prepared her for the role—she took Mankiewicz' stylish witticisms and made them sound as if they were spontaneous, inspired. She created a charismatic fictional star who was also an intuitive, hardboiled woman: she could simultaneously revel in artifice and see through it. And Davis was still a knockout. Other actresses might have gotten almost as many laughs; Davis made Margo's nervy intelligence sexy.*

Theatre 80 St. Marks, 80 St. Marks Pl. (254-7400)
June 24: "L'Avventura" (1959, Michelangelo Antonioni; in Italian), with Monica Vitti, Gabriele Ferzetti, and Léa Massari; and "L'Amore" (1948, Roberto Rossellini; in Italian), with Anna Magnani.
June 25: "The Fountainhead" (1949, King Vidor), with Gary Cooper, Patricia Neal, and Raymond Massey; and "The V.I.P.s" (1963, Anthony Asquith), with Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, Louis Jourdan, Maggie Smith, Orson Welles, Margaret Rutherford, Linda Christian, and Rod Taylor.
June 26: "Young and Innocent" ("The Girl Was Young"; 1937, Alfred Hitchcock), with Nova Pilbeam and Derrick de Marney; and "Murder" (1930, Hitchcock), with Herbert Marshall and Norah Baring.
June 27: "The Big Sleep" (1946, Howard Hawks), with Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, and Martha Vickers; and "The Kennel Murder Case" (†).
June 28-29: "All About Eve" (see blurb above); and "Sunset Boulevard" (1950, Billy Wilder), with Gloria Swanson, William Holden, and Erich von Stroheim.
June 30: "Rebel Without a Cause" (1955, Nicholas Ray), with James Dean, Natalie Wood, Sal Mineo, Nick Adams, and Corey Allen; and "Blue Denim" (1959, Philip Dunne), with Carol Lynley, Brandon deWilde, and Macdonald Carey.
July 1: "Smiles of a Summer Night" (1955, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish), with Ulla Jacobsson, Eva Dahlbeck, Gunnar Björnstrand, and Jarl Kulle; and "The Magic Flute" (1975, Bergman; in Swedish).

MOVIE HOUSES—Cont'd

July 2: "Rain" (†); and "Of Human Bondage" (see page 15).

July 3: "Macbeth" (1971, Roman Polanski), with Jon Finch; and "Chimes at Midnight" ("Falstaff"; 1967, Orson Welles), with Welles, Jeanne Moreau, John Gielgud, Keith Baxter, and Margaret Rutherford.

FILM LIBRARIES, ETC.

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9490)—June 24 at 2:30: "The Lady Vanishes" (1938, directed by Alfred Hitchcock), with Dame May Whitty, Margaret Lockwood, Michael Redgrave, Paul Lukas, and Cecil Parker. . . . ¶ June 24 at 3: "Naked Spaces: Living Is Round" (1985, Trinh T. Minh-ha), a documentary. . . . ¶ June 24 at 6: "Our Hospitality" (1923, Buster Keaton and Clyde Bruckman), with Keaton and Natalie Talmadge. . . . ¶ June 24 at 6: "Nicaragua 1979: Scenes of the Revolution" (1980, John Chapman), a documentary; and "Maria's Story" (1990, Pamela Cohen, Catherine Ryan, and Monona Wali), a documentary. . . . ¶ June 25 at 2:30 and June 29 at 5: "Tokyo Story" (1953, Yasujiro Ozu; in Japanese). . . . ¶ June 25 at 3: "Making the News Fit" (1986, Beth Sanders), "Vietnam Experience" (1987, Daniel Keller and Joe McDonald), and "RocketKitKongoKit" (1986, Craig Baldwin). . . . ¶ June 25 at 6 and June 29 at 2: "Pather Panchali" (1955, Satyajit Ray; in Bengali). . . . ¶ June 25 at 6: "Christopher Alexander" (1990, Ruth Landy) and three other short films made at the Film Arts Foundation, in San Francisco. . . . ¶ June 27 at 2:30 and July 1 at 6: "Variety Lights" (1950, Alberto Lattuada and Federico Fellini; in Italian), with Giulietta Masina. . . . ¶ June 27 at 3 and 6: "DiAna's Hair Ego: AIDS Info Up Front" (1990, Ellen Spiro) and "Outrageous Taxi Stories" (1989, Joe Berlinger). . . . ¶ June 27 at 6 and July 1 at 2:30: "Trans-Europ-Express" (1966, Alain Robbe-Grillet; in French), with Jean-Louis Trintignant, Marie-France Pisier, and Nadine Verdier. . . . ¶ June 28 at 2:30 and June 30 at 5: "Three Strange Loves" (1949, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish), with Eva Henning. . . . ¶ June 28 at 3: "Dark Circle" (1982, Judy Irving, Chris Beaver, and Ruth Landy), a documentary. . . . ¶ June 28 at 6 and June 30 at 2: "The Road of Life" (1931, Nikolai Ekk; in Russian). . . . ¶ June 28 at 6: A program of short animated films made at the Film Arts Foundation. . . . ¶ June 29 at 2:30: "The Day After Trinity" (1980, Jon Else), a documentary. . . . ¶ June 29 at 5, June 30 at 2:30, July 1 at 6, and July 2 at 3: Four different programs of short films made at the Film Arts Foundation. . . . ¶ June 30 at 5: "Sewing Woman" (1983, Arthur Dong), "Jude" (1982, Drew Klausner), and "Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo" (1985, Susana Muñoz and Lourdes Portillo). . . . ¶ July 1 at 3: "Juan Felix Sanchez" (1982, Calogero Salvo) and "Boneshop of the Heart: Folk Offerings from the American South" (1990, Scott Crocker and Toshiaki Ozawa). . . . ¶ July 2 at 2:30: "The Guard" (1989, Aleksandr Rogoschkin; in Russian). . . . ¶ July 2 at 6: "The Tall Target" (1951, Anthony Mann), with Dick Powell and Adolphe Menjou. . . . ¶ July 2 at 6: "The Times of Harvey Milk" (1984, Robert Epstein and Richard Schmiechen).

Anthology Film Archives, 32-34 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (477-2714)—June 26 at 7: "With Blood and Rope" (1990, János Erdélyi and Dezso Zsigmond; in Hungarian). . . . ¶ June 26 at 9:30: "Man of Aran" (1934, Robert Flaherty). . . . ¶ June 27 at 7: "The Dog's Night Song" (1983, Gabor Body; in Hungarian). . . . ¶ June 27 at 9:30: "Film Portrait" (1971, Jerome Hill). . . . ¶ June 28 at 8: "After the Revolution" (1990, Andras Szirtes; in Hungarian). . . . ¶ June 28 at 9:30 and June 29 at 8: Two different programs of short films by Barry Gerson. . . . ¶ June 29 at 4: "The Documentator" (1989, István Dárday and Gyorgyi Szalai; in Hungarian). . . . ¶ June 29 at 10 and June 30 at 8: "Un Chant d'Amour" (1950, Jean Genet), "Pull My Daisy" (1959, Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie), and "Blonde Cobra" (1962, Ken Jacobs and Bob Fleischner). . . . ¶ June 30 at 4: "Recsk, the Hungarian Gulag" (1989, Livia Gyarmathy and Géza Böszörményi; in Hungarian). . . . ¶ July 1 at 8: "Slacker" (1991, Richard Linklater). . . . ¶ July 3 at 8 and 9:30: "Jimi Hendrix at the Isle of Wight" (1991, Murray Lerner), a documentary of the 1970 music festival.

Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. (752-3015)—June 24 at 6:30: "Invisible Citizen" (1983, Keiko Tsuno; in Japanese). . . . ¶ June 28 at 6:30: "Days of Waiting" (1990, Steven Okazaki; in Japanese), "Yuki Shimoda: Asian American Actor" (1985, John Esaki; in Japanese), and "Family Gathering" (1988, Li[illegible] Yasui; in Japanese).

Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., State Office Building, 163 W. 125th St. (873-5040)—June 28 at 1 and 4:20: "The FBI's War on Black America" (1990, Denis Mueller), "Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary" (1990), and "Black and Blue" (1987, Lamar Williams). . . . ¶ June 28 at 6:30: "The Spook Who Sat by the Door" (1973, Ivan Dixon) and "Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary." . . . ¶ June 29 at 1 and 4:15: "Lord Chango" (1974, Ray Marsh), with Lawrence Cook; and "The River Niger" (1976, Krishna Shah), with James Earl Jones, Louis Gossett, Jr., Cicely Tyson, and Glynn Turman. . . . ¶ June 29 at 6: "The Making of 'Glory' " (1989); and "Glory" (1989, Edward Zwick), with Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman, and Matthew Broderick. . . . ¶ June 30 at 3: "John Lee Hooker: Mississippi Down Home Blues" (1981, Michael Prussian), "After Hours: Coleman Hawkins and Roy Eldridge" (1959, Shepherd Traube), and "The Last of the Blue Devils" (1980, Bruce Ricker).

Metropolitan Museum of Art, 5th Ave. at 81st St. (879-5500)—June 29 at 6: "Rebecca" (1940, Alfred Hitchcock), with Laurence Olivier, Joan Fontaine, and George Sanders.

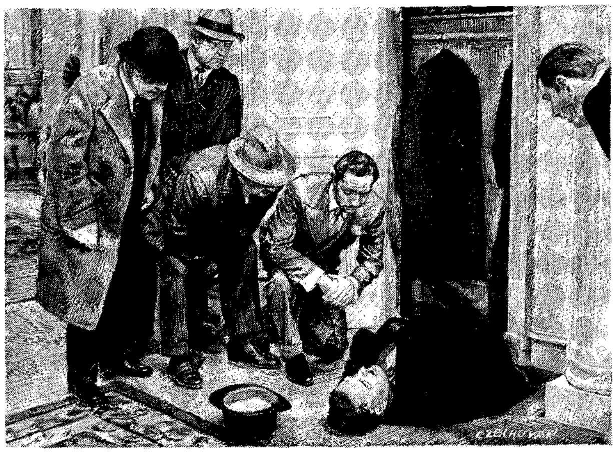
IN BRIEF

SEE ABOVE FOR THEATRE ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS.
IF A MOVIE HAS BEEN REVIEWED IN "THE CURRENT CINEMA" DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS, THE DATE OF ITS REVIEW IS GIVEN.

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael, Terrence Rafferty, and Michael Sragow.)

Alice—Woody Allen's latest picture is an awkward blend of whimsy and moralizing. The title character, played by Mia Farrow, is a pampered Upper East Side lady-who-lunches. She lives in a huge apartment with her handsome husband (William Hurt), her adorable children, and a staff, and she looks terrific. But her life, the movie tells us, is totally empty and false. A Chinatown doctor (Keye Luke) gives her a variety of herbal remedies to knock the yuppie malaise out of her system. One of them makes her invisible; one makes her irresistible to men; and so on. As these fantasy episodes mount up, Alice begins to see how artificial her life is, how far she's strayed from the pure ideals of her Catholic girlhood, how much more love she needs than she has been getting, and what a revolting piece of Wasp slime her husband is. In the end, the heroine seems, incredibly, to have redeemed herself through self-absorption; the movie doesn't benefit from any such miracle. Although there are more jokes here than in any of Allen's last few features, the picture isn't really a comedy; it's a sermon with gags. The large cast also includes Joe Mantegna, Alec Baldwin, Blythe Danner, Judy Davis, Bob Balaban, and Bernadette Peters (who does a sensational brief turn as a cynical muse).—T.R. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/31/90.) (Loews Village Theatre VII, and Quad Cinema.)

An Angel at My Table—Based on the autobiography of the New Zealand novelist and poet Janet Frame. The film covers the first forty years or so of the writer's life—she was born in 1924—and takes close to three hours to tell the story. When it's all over, you feel that you know far too little about Janet Frame and far too much about the film's director, Jane Campion. The movie (which was made as a three-part miniseries for Australian television) is a succession of odd, mannered tableaux, more or less in the style of Campion's 1990 art-house hit, "Sweetie." The compositions emphasize the peculiarities of Janet's appearance, especially in her childhood and awkward adolescence: she has a stiff, frizzy mop of bright-orange hair, and her teeth are badly decayed. The Janet Frame we see in this film doesn't seem to have an inner life, and without that she has no life at all. Even the most dramatic events in her life are treated so flatly and elliptically that we're unable to respond; time after time, we find that we can't orient ourselves in crucial scenes, because the director hasn't bothered to establish the characters or the setting. Writers' lives are weird enough without being subjected to this sort of willful disruption of their emotional continuity. Campion's perverse exercise in biographical filmmaking deserves a new title: "My Incomprehensible Career." Janet is played by three actresses: as a child, by Alexia Keogh; as a young teenager, by Karen Fergusson; and, as an adult, by Kerry Fox.—T.R. (6/3/91) (Angelika Film Center; through June 27.)



William Powell in "The Kennel Murder Case"

Au Hasard, Balthazar (1966)—Robert Bresson's grave, oblique account of the life and suffering of a donkey, and the life and suffering of the people who mistreat him. It's a meditation on sin and saintliness. Considered a masterpiece by some, but others may find it painstakingly tedious and offensively holy. With Anne Wiazemsky as the passive, puffy-mouthed girl who falls in love with the cruel, thieving boy who is bound to make her miserable. In French.—P.K. (Public Theatre; July 2-3.)

Backdraft—This urban disaster/action movie makes the audience laugh just once: when a stalwart fireman (Scott Glenn), still on the scene of his latest conquered blaze, takes a drag on a cigarette. It's one of the few grand-old-movie gestures that click in what amounts to a compendium of men-at-work clichés. The plot centers on estranged brothers Kurt Russell (a soon-to-be-legendary firefighter) and William Baldwin (an anxious apprentice), who work out their differences in the midst of mysterious arsons and towering infernos. Gregory Widen's script is like a *Mad* parody played straight, full of "Scenes We Wouldn't Like to See." The effects are boggling, but the director, Ron Howard, employs them like a cross between a night-club hypnotist and a hardware salesman—his characters murmur about fire's mesmerizing and bestial qualities, then he hits the audience with flames and hoses. Russell is appealingly brash until a bogus subplot forces him to suggest borderline psychosis. Jennifer Jason Leigh and Rebecca De Mornay also show up, but only Robert De Niro, as an arson investigator, and Donald Sutherland, as a pyromaniac, rise above the material. The conflagrations may keep some viewers occupied (so do televised Yule logs), but most will remember De Niro's saturnine doggedness and Sutherland's repulsive smirk.—M.S. (34th Street East, Beekman, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Waverly, Chelsea Cinemas, and Olympia.)

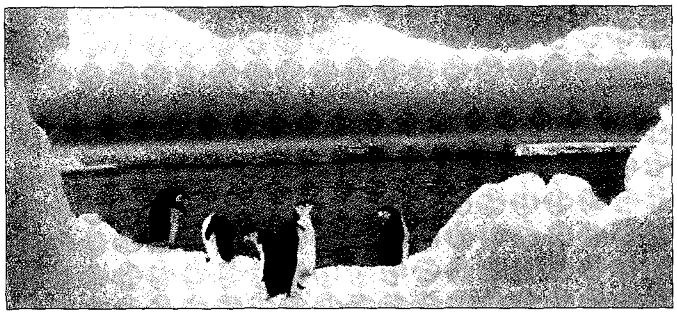
City Slickers—This feel-good comedy, directed by Ron Underwood from a script by Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel, is a depressingly efficient piece of Hollywood product. The hero, Mitch Robbins (Billy Crystal), is a thirty-nine-year-old New York family man who's going through a killer midlife crisis. His wife (Patricia Wettig) gets so fed up with his moping that she virtually orders him to take a vacation with his buddies, Ed (Bruno Kirby) and Phil (Daniel Stern); Ed, a daredevil, macho type, has arranged for them to spend two weeks on a real cattle drive out West. Mitch's wife looks him in the eye, and says earnestly, "Go and find your smile"—and, ninety minutes later, there it is, a grin as big as all outdoors. His pals pick up the odd nugget of wisdom along the trail, too. The movie alternates predictable tenderfoot gags (sore behinds, stampedes, and the like) with long, ludicrous passages of group-therapy-on-the-range. Jack Palance, as Curly, the trail boss, manages some dry, macabre comic effects, and the animals are good—they're interesting to look at, and they don't make bad jokes. You can't help sympathizing with the cattle; by the time the movie is over, you know what it feels like to be part of the herd. Also with Helen Slater.—T.R. (6/17/91) (Loews Village Theatre VII, Loews 34th Street Showplace, Loews New York Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Loews 84th Street Sixplex, and Loews Astor Plaza.)

The Comfort of Strangers—Harold Pinter's screenplay, adapted from a novel by Ian McEwan, is a kinky contemporary variation on the sort of plot that made Victorian readers shiver—the story of innocents lured into the clutches of charming villains. The innocents here are an unmarried English couple (Natasha Richardson and Rupert Everett) vacationing in Venice; the evil seducers are a husband and wife (Christopher Walken and Helen Mirren) whose tastes run to voyeurism and sadomasochism; the dread lair in which the monsters toy with their prey is a huge, ornately furnished apartment with a spectacular view of the city. The director, Paul Schrader, dresses his characters in Armani and sets the camera in motion to swirl gracefully around them, picking up miragelike shimmers from the canals and beautiful but ominous architectural details; the languorous camera movements create an authentically gothic sense of catastrophe just around the corner. Walken glides effortlessly through his role as the embodiment of Old World evil. He gives the character a lordly, sinister air, and suggests, as well, that he's wearing something really odd underneath his superbly tailored white suits. And Richardson is characteristically amazing: she brings a touch of humanity to this rather formal party. The movie improves on the novel by jettisoning its dubious psychology and its pretensions to literary significance. Schrader treats the story as an elegant horror-movie game, a trick done with mirrors, and he carries it off. Dante Spinotti's cinematography and Gianni Quaranta's production design contribute to the luxurious, decadent atmosphere. Music by Angelo Badalamenti. —T.R. (4/8/91) (Angelika Film Center.)

The Cool World (1964)—Shirley Clarke's documentary-style film, based on Warren Miller's novel and the play by Miller and Robert Rossen. Hampton Clanton plays Duke, the fourteen-year-old Harlem boy who is trying to get a gun from a racketeer (Carl Lee) so he can be leader of his gang, the Royal Pythons. The footage, shot by Baird Bryant, is often fine in itself (and it's far superior to the juvenile-gang story), but it's used for a facile cry of social outrage and for "art," rather than being integrated with the story. The film tries to encompass too much: you get the feeling that the director thought she could use everything good that she caught. There are beautiful bits, but they don't come together. Dizzy Gillespie, James Moody, Mal Waldron, and others are on the jazz and rock-and-roll track. The cast includes Gloria Foster and Clarence Williams III. Screen adaptation by Shirley Clarke and Carl Lee.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; June 29.)

Eating—All the action in Henry Jaglom's film takes place at the fortieth-birthday party of

Strictly For The Birds



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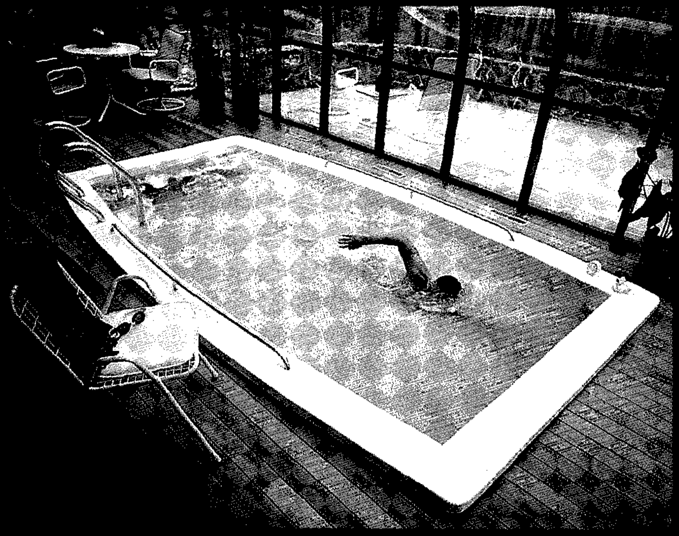

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IN BRIEF–Cont'd

a Southern California woman named Helene (Lisa Richards), and all the characters—thirty-eight of them—are women. None of the women at this party—with the exception of Helene's mother (Frances Bergen), who represents the values of an older generation—can eat without guilt; several of them have clinical eating disorders, for which they hate themselves. Jaglom films them in his usual group-therapy style: the camera remains fixed as characters lob banal confessions and accusations at each other. This is meant to create the illusion of raw emotional truth, but the bulimics' ball Jaglom throws here isn't much of a party, and it's bad therapy, too. The big naked truth that pops out of the cake is: women are so obsessed with their bodies that they're incapable of enjoying even the simple pleasure of eating. Whatever Jaglom may have intended, his film winds up trivializing its theme and humiliating its subjects. He's advertising the movie as "A Very Serious Comedy About Women and Food," but its "serious" message is glibly offensive, and there's nothing funny about it. Also with Gwen Welles, Mary Crosby, Nelly Alard, Marlena Giovi, and Daphna Kastner.—T.R. (5/20/91) (Cinema Village 12th Street.)

Europa Europa—With Marco Hofschneider and Julie Delpy, directed by Agnieszka Holland. In German and Russian. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Lincoln Plaza; starting June 28.)

La Femme Nikita—The end of French cinema as we know it. Written and directed by Luc Besson. With Anne Parillaud, Jean-Hugues Anglade, Tcheky Karyo, and (in a cameo) Jeanne Moreau. In French.—T.R. (Angelika Film Center, and Carnegie Hall Cinema.)

Hudson Hawk—You want to wipe the stupid grin off its face. Alchemy is at the core of this feckless action comedy about a cat burglar (Bruce Willis) coerced by depraved his-and-hers tycoons (Richard E. Grand and Sandra Bernhard) into recovering parts of Leonardo da Vinci's long-lost gold machine (a purely fictional creation). But the film performs reverse alchemy: it turns gold (a forty-million-dollar-plus budget) into lead. The action is frenetic, facetious, and overblown; the repartee is insultingly hipper-than-thou. Bernhard is especially grating. Her character is named Minerva; she must have thought she was playing Medusa. Willis does his cutesy, self-adoring thing, and most of the cast joins in, including Andie MacDowell as his love interest and Danny Aiello as his sidekick. Joel Silver produced; Michael Lehmann directed; Steven E. de Souza and Daniel Waters wrote the script, from a story by Willis (the film's prime mover) and Robert Kraft (who also was executive producer and co-wrote the music).—M.S. (Loews 19th Street East 6. . . . ¶ Criterion Center. Evenings only.)

Impromptu—James Lapine's film is an ebullient and absurdly entertaining account of the famous love affair of George Sand and Frédéric Chopin. The script, by Sarah Kernochan, makes Sand's wooing and winning of frail, chaste young Chopin into a busy exercise in farce, with a full complement of deception and setbacks and misunderstandings. Celebrities of the Romantic movement—Delacroix, Musset, and Liszt among them—are put through their paces, along with George and Frédéric, in the salons and ballrooms and country houses of eighteen-thirties France; they issue florid declarations of love, hurl barbed epigrams at their rivals, challenge each other to duels, and, over all, make complete asses of themselves in their pursuit of the sublime. They're lively company. The historical figures in this movie are cartoons, but they're cartoons with recognizable human qualities, and the actors look as if they were having a wonderful time charging around in their period costumes. Hugh Grant's Chopin is a brilliant caricature of the Romantic ideal of the artist; he gives the character an air of befuddled unworldliness, and punctuates his readings with delicately timed tubercular coughs. Judy Davis plays Sand—a great actress in a great role. Davis makes Sand's passionate absurdities both funny and tremendously moving; this woman's willingness to embarrass herself seems a kind of romantic heroism. Also with Bernadette Peters, Julian Sands (as Liszt), Mandy Patinkin (as Musset), Emma Thompson, Ralph Brown (as Delacroix), George Corraface, Anton Rodgers, and Anna Massey. The costumes, by Jenny Beavan, are spectacular.—T.R. (5/6/91) (Village East Cinemas, Loews 19th Street East 6, Worldwide Cinemas, and 57th St. Playhouse.)

Ju Dou—It's been compared to James M. Cain, but the postman barely rings once in this tale of adultery Chinese style. In a small mountain village in the twenties, an impotent dye-mill owner (Li Wei), crazed over his lack of an heir, tortures his beautiful young bride (Gong Li). She seeks comfort in the arms of his worker nephew (Li Bao-Tian). There's no compelling plot, only the grinding inevitability of fate and tradition. The director, Zhang Yimou, simply metes out punishment to the lovers, the tyrant—and the audience. The lovers' son does most of the damage. He has the lethal power of the Children of the Damned—unfortunately, without the gimmicky zest of their eerie, glowing eyeballs. Zhang started out as a painter and still photographer. He remains one, devoting more attention to the dye mill's set design than to the story or the characters. The bolts of fabric are colored in subtle, vivid hues; the people are made out of whole cloth. In Mandarin.—M.S. (Village East Cinemas, and Worldwide Cinemas. . . . ¶ Eastside Cinemas; through June 27.)

At the Newman Theatre, Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard in "Brief Encounter"

Jungle Fever—The central event in Spike Lee's new movie is the love affair of Flipper (Wesley Snipes), a married African-American architect from Harlem, and Angie (Annabella Sciorra), an Italian-American office temp from Bensonhurst. Once Lee has set up the interracial relationship, he seems to lose interest in it; Flipper and Angie hold the stage only long enough to ignite the fears and hatreds of their communities, and when the fuse is lit their job is done. The movie's approach to its characters is stubbornly, and perversely, external; we never have the sense that we're getting inside anyone's skin (white or black). Everything in this picture is pitched at the level of public utterance. Lee's dialogue has the rhetorical tone of daytime-television talk shows; even in the most intense, emotionally charged domestic scenes, there's an alienating self-consciousness in the way the characters express themselves—they always look as if they had an ear cocked for audience response. This rhetorical barrage gives the picture a peculiar, halting rhythm: individual scenes have force and momentum, but the movie as a whole seems stalled, inert, uncertain where it's headed. And Lee's attitude toward interracial sex is shockingly puritanical; it's as if he were afraid that any hint of eroticism would constitute an endorsement of Flipper and Angie's affair. He keeps cutting away from the lovers' scenes together, directing our attention to situations that allow him to make confident, unambiguous statements. The scenes that deal with Flipper's crackhead brother, Gator (Samuel L. Jackson), have more energy than anything else in the picture; this subplot is tangential to the central theme, but it has some shape and dramatic coherence, and it actually builds to a climax. The interracial affair just dawdles to an underdramatized parting, and we feel nothing; emotionally, the movie has separated the lovers from each other, and from us, long before. Also with Lonette McKee, John Turturro, Anthony Quinn, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, and Frank Vincent. The inventive cinematography is by Ernest Dickerson. Some fine new songs by Stevie Wonder grace the soundtrack.—T.R. (6/17/91) (Murray Hill Cinemas, Manhattan Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Waverly, Chelsea Cinemas, Worldwide Cinemas, Metro Cinema, and National Twin.)

The Kennel Murder Case (1933)—One of the pleasanter films in the series starring the suave comedian William Powell as S. S. Van Dine's detective Philo Vance. The plot involves some lively Scotties and a handsome Doberman, as well as that sinister figure, the connoisseur of Oriental objects of art. (In the thirties, Ming and murder always seemed to go together.) Mary Astor, at an in-between stage in her career, has a conventional role that doesn't much suit her; however, most of the other players are cast so inevitably to type that the film is like a demonstration of the principles of running a stock company. The group includes snake-hipped Helen Vinson, wicked Jack La Rue, tedious Ralph Morgan, and Paul Cavanagh, Etienne Girardot, Robert Barrat, Eugene Pallette, Frank Conroy, Arthur Hohl, Henry O'Neill, and Robert McWade. Directed by Michael Curtiz.—P.K. (Theatre 80 St. Marks; June 27.)

Let's Get Lost (1988)—This documentary, by Bruce Weber, isn't primarily about Chet Baker the jazz trumpeter and singer: it's about Chet Baker the love object, the fetish. And maybe because Weber, despite his lifelong fixation on this charmer, knew him only as a battered, treacherous wreck, in the two years before his death, it's one of the most suggestive (and unresolved) films ever made. The soundtrack is made up of Baker recordings that span more than three decades—the idealized essence of the man. The 16-mm. black-and-white cinematography (by Jeff Preiss) is reticent yet expressive, impassioned; the film has a great look.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; June 27-28.)

Paris Is Burning—Jennie Livingston's documentary about gay black and Latino men who compete in drag balls is a beautiful piece of work—lively, intelligent, exploratory. The drag queens we see here seem to be holding up a mirror to the world of the empowered as they see it in movies, TV shows, and magazines. In the ballroom, some present themselves as elegant, glamorous women in designer outfits, and walk with the hip-swinging slouch of runway models, while others adopt more mundane personas: college students (of both sexes); military men; Wall Street businessmen; aristocrats at play, dressed for yachting or riding to hounds. The criteria by which all these turns are judged is verisimilitude—"realness." The material is almost too rich, too suggestive. Everything about the ball culture signifies so blatantly and so promiscuously that the movie induces a kind of semiotic daze. Livingston is smart enough not to reduce her subjects to the sum of their possible meanings, perhaps because she realizes that the way the drag performers manipulate image and fetishes and the iconography of popular culture is for many of them a sophisticated form of humor. The most self-aware of the gay men in this picture revel in the ironies of their social and sexual identities, and Livingston makes us appreciate the comic grace and the strange wisdom of that approach. Like all the best documentary filmmakers, she does her subjects the honor of allowing them to retain some of their mystery.—T.R. (3/25/91) (Film Forum.)

Perfectly Normal—Crossed cultures and cross-dressing meet in this blissfully funny romance and odd-couple movie, set in a Canadian backwater. It's one of those rare farces that quench every appetite. Michael Riley plays a brewery worker, hockey player, covert opera lover, and cabdriver; Robbie Coltrane plays the fare who came to dinner—an overt opera lover and reckless restaurateur. These two make beautiful music together. The bulging, ebullient Coltrane is a blithe, antic wind god, blasting his partner with one inspiration after another; the reedy, masterfully deadpan Riley is his untuned aeolian harp. When Coltrane comes up with the idea of a bistro where the waiters and waitresses don operatic costumes and sing arias, Riley agrees to bankroll it, and to slip into drag for a duet (with Coltrane) from Bellini's "Nor-ma." The script, by Eugene Lipinski and Paul Quarrington (based partly on Lipinski's own experiences in provincial Canada), is acutely droll about the incongruity of the heroes' dreams. Yves Simoneau directs in an oddball yet expansive and lushly emotional style that suits Riley's inner passions and Coltrane's outer ones. Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet" provides terrific background music for beer-bottling as well as for some of the love scenes. And the exuberance of the supporting players is transporting. Deborah Duchene as Riley's girlfriend, Elizabeth Harpur as Coltrane's favorite floozy, Kenneth Welsh, Ellen Rae Hennesey, Jack Nichols, and Kristina Nicoll express the affinities beneath their characters' disparities. You're tickled to meet the citizens of this mixed-up small city. It's like TV's "Northern Exposure" without the whiff of self-congratulation.—M.S. (Cinema Village 3rd Avenue; through June 27.)

Rain (1932)—Joan Crawford is the innocent-at-heart tramp Sadie Thompson in this version of the Somerset Maugham wheezer, adapted by Maxwell Anderson and directed by Lewis Milestone. Crawford is the most unnuanced actress imaginable, and her interpretation of Sadie has absolutely no delicacy. Yet this time her desperate earnestness is fixating. With all the emotion she pours on, and her flashing eyes and twisted-scar mouth and strained voice, she's so totally affected that the affectation begins to seem natural. Her vitality is undeniable. As the sanctimonious Reverend Davidson (Hollywood's archetypal lustful hypocrite), Walter Huston has some startlingly shrewd moments, but the production is stilted and claustrophobic—obviously, the dated stage version of the Maugham story dominated the moviemakers' thinking. With William Gargan, Beulah Bondi, Guy Kibbee, and Matt Moore.—P.K. (Theatre 80 St. Marks; July 2.)

Richard III (1956)—Laurence Olivier makes Shakespeare's "son of hell" such a magnetic, chilling, amusing monster that the villainy arouses an almost immoral delight. As director and star, Olivier succeeds with the soliloquies as neither he nor anyone else ever did on film before; they're intimate yet brazen. If the film were all malevolent crookback Richard, it would be a marvel; unfortunately, he was plagued with quantities of associates and relations, and even when impersonated by Ralph Richardson, John Gielgud, Cedric Hardwicke, etc., they're a dull lot. The William Walton score is unimaginative, and the Book-of-Hours camera setups decompose into common calendar art. But none of this matters very much when you can watch Olivier's lewd courtship of Claire Bloom and hear the inflections he gives lines like "I am not in the giving vein today." With Stanley Baker, Norman Wooland, Pamela Brown, Alec Clunes, Nicholas Hannen, Laurence Naismith, John Laurie, Helen Haye, Michael Gough, and Esmond Knight. Produced by Alexander Korda and Olivier; the adaptation is by Olivier and Alan Dent.—P.K. (Newman Theatre; June 28-29.)

Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves—With Kevin Costner, directed by Kevin Reynolds. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, Baronet, Coronet, 86th Street East Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Loews 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

Soapdish—The punchy, wisecracking love child of "Tootsie" and "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown." In the mad, mad, mad, mad world of daytime television, on- and off-screen soap operas collide, creating a series of explosions building to one big bang. With Sally Field as the American Sweetheart who turns into the Queen of Misery, Whoopi Goldberg as her best friend and head writer, Cathy Moriarty as her rival, Robert Downey, Jr., as her producer, and (best of all) Kevin Kline as her one-time lover and resurrected co-star, it's the kind of brash entertainment Hollywood isn't supposed to be able to make anymore—a whirling show-biz farce sped up for the era of instant infotainment. The characters have emotional-seepage problems: their competitive drives and backstage frustrations keep leaking into their jobs. Kline, in his most skillful and risible screen performance yet, has an additional dilemma—he can't locate any unrehearsed feelings. The movie's director, Michael Hoffman, brings out the jester in everyone; the editor, Garth Craven, cuts for maximum snap. And the screenwriters, Andrew Bergman and Robert Harling, wring fun out of fustian and keep the shallow characters on the run. Daytime TV is thought to be too easy to lampoon. But through a combination of lowdown parody and soapsmanship, Hoffman and company satirize the seemingly unsatirizable. With Elisabeth Shue, Teri Hatcher, and, in a pair of sharp, brief comic turns, Carrie Fisher and Garry Marshall.—M.S. (Loews 19th Street East 6, Loews Tower East, Art Greenwich Twin, and Loews Paramount. . . . ¶ Loews 34th Street Showplace; through June 27.)

Thelma & Louise—The heroines, played by Geena Davis (Thelma) and Susan Sarandon (Louise), are a couple of Arkansas women who set out for a weekend in the mountains and wind up speeding through the Southwest, on the run from the law. (Louise has murdered a man who tried to rape Thelma in a roadhouse parking lot.) The movie, written by Callie Khouri and directed by Ridley Scott, is designed to keep pushing the women farther and farther out there—past the point of no return, into the vanishing point of a vast Western landscape, and, finally, over the edge of the world. It's a pretty shameless outlaw fantasy; the feminist justification that the script provides for the heroines' behavior doesn't make their actions any less preposterous. But you can recognize the crudeness of the movie's narrative devices and still have an awfully good time. The film has the hellbent energy of a drive-in exploitation movie, and it's eventful—it isn't just figures drifting dazedly through alienating landscapes. There's an exhilarating ease and intuitiveness in the way Davis and Sarandon work together, and the camera lingers on them as if it couldn't get enough of them. Scott seems to want to show us what they look like in every kind of light and every kind of mood. His direction gives the story a pleasantly dreamy quality: when Thelma and Louise are on the road, the movie has the look of a mirage, a jewelled shimmer that keeps us half hypnotized. He turns Davis and Sarandon into outlaw princesses, and they're so vivid and likable that they carry us past the plot's most obvious contrivances; a little disbelief seems a small price to pay for being allowed to remain in their company.—T.R. (6/3/91) (Loews Village Theatre VII, Loews 34th Street Showplace, Guild, and Loews 84th Street Sixplex. . . . ¶ Loews New York Twin; through June 27.)

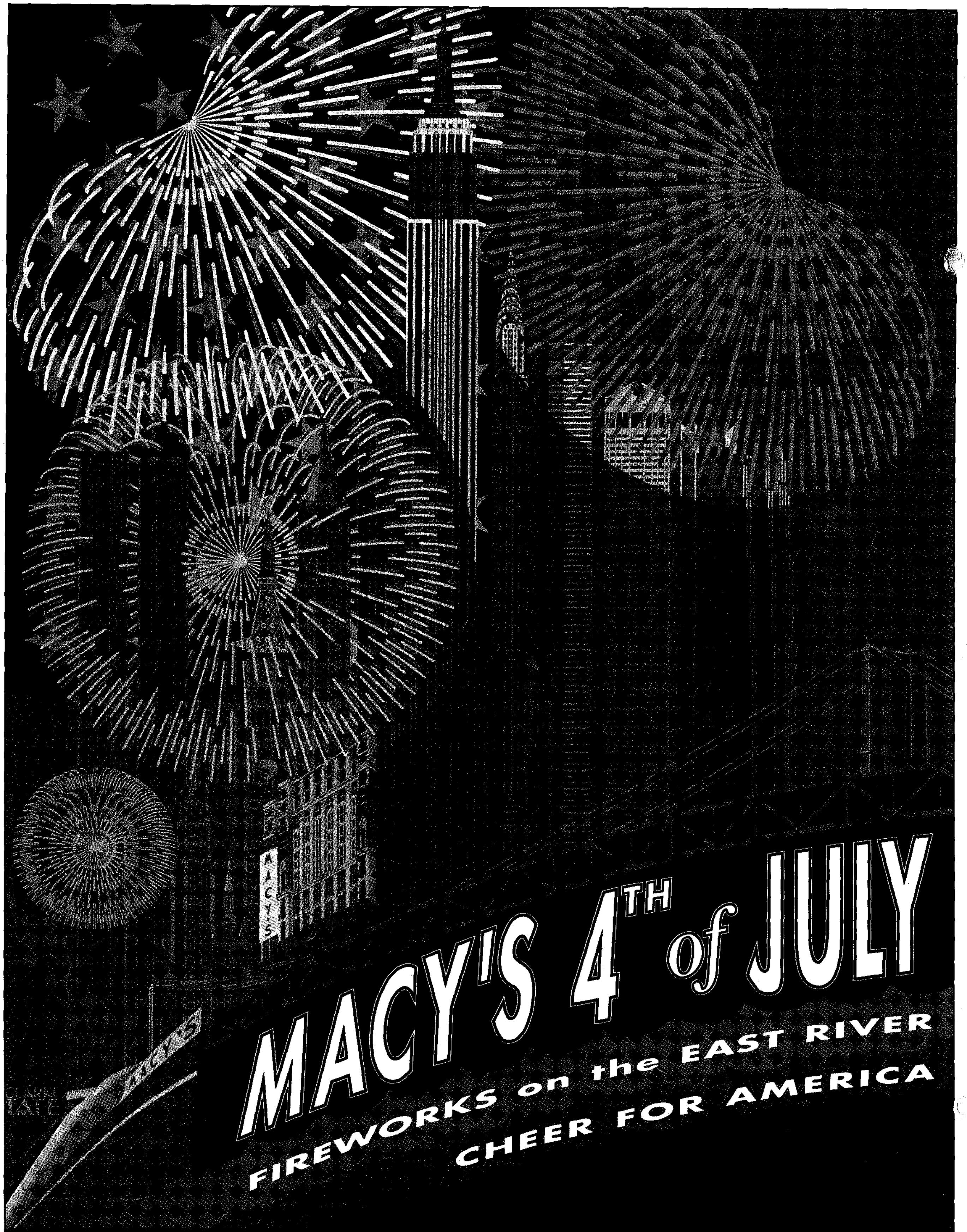
To Be or Not to Be (1942)—Some people have great affection for this anti-Nazi comedy-melodrama, with its knockabout seriousness. The stars are Carole Lombard and Jack Benny, bizarrely cast as a famous Polish actress and her actor husband; the plot involves actors disguising themselves as Nazis in order to foil the Nazis. Ernst Lubitsch, who directed, starts off on the wrong foot and never gets his balance; the performers yowl their lines, and the burlesque of the Nazis, who cower before their superior officers, is more crudely gleeful than funny. With Robert Stack, Lionel Atwill, Stanley Ridges, Felix Bressart, Tom Dugan (as Hitler), Sig Rumann, Maude Eburne, Halliwell Hobbes, and Miles Mander. Produced by Lubitsch and Alexander Korda, for United Artists. Edwin Justus Mayer wrote the script, from a story conceived by Lubitsch and Melchior Lengyel. Cinematography by Rudolph Maté. It was Lombard's last film; two weeks after completing it, she was killed in a plane crash while on a tour to sell defense bonds.—P.K. (Newman Theatre; June 30.)

Truly, Madly, Deeply—A lovely, original comedy about a young woman, named Nina (Juliet Stevenson), who is obsessed with the memory of her dead lover. The writer and director, Anthony Minghella, establishes an unusual, delicately varied mood, and the film moves gracefully from a realistic mode into a fantastic one. One night, Nina's lover, Jamie (Alan Rickman), reappears in her flat, and his presence seems perfectly natural to us: he has emerged from a setting that is already charged with the heroine's feelings for him. Once he's back, she has to confront, in the most concrete way, what it would really mean to live the rest of her life with a dead guy as her significant other: the movie is less a ghost story than a weird kind of domestic comedy. Minghella draws us into a fresh and startlingly humane vision of modern urban life; the details of the heroine's way of living always seem to point beyond themselves, and there's an emotional unity to everything we see. Minghella writes dialogue that sounds casual but somehow takes us straight to the heart of his work's larger concerns, and he directs the actors beautifully. Rickman is unexpectedly romantic here, and very funny besides. And Stevenson gives a radiant performance: she doesn't have a false moment, or a boring one, in the whole picture. Also with Michael Maloney, Christopher Rózycki, Stella Maris, David Ryall, Deborah Findlay, and the always marvellous Bill Paterson. Cinematography by Remi Adefarasin.—T.R. (5/6/91) (Cinema 3.)

Truth or Dare—Madonna was at her best on "Saturday Night Live," when she played herself for laughs as a pop temptress who puts out for her fans. But in this maddeningly prolonged, self-important, semi-documentary backstage look at her Blond Ambition tour, she plays not just for laughs but for shocks, tears, leers, and, most of all, for adoration. Her way of being truthful and daring is to allow the young director, Alek Keshishian, to depict her as a twenty-four-hour diva who mothers her backup performers and as a scantily clad Statue of Liberty standing up for free expression. The bits of her stage show (shot in 35-mm. color; the rest is in 16-mm. black-and-white) seem ludicrous when she describes them as part of "an emotional journey." The movie has been so over-reported that the celebrity bits with Warren Beatty, Kevin Costner, and Sandra Bernhard, and the friction among members of Madonna's biological and stage families, come off as the retold story. There's no jolt left to seeing Madonna do what you've already read about. The movie is all calculation, no revelation—unless you count the calculation itself as a revelation.—M.S. (Loews Village Theatre VII, and Worldwide Cinemas. . . . ¶ 23rd St. West Triplex. Evenings only. . . . ¶ U. A. East; through June 27, evenings only. . . . ¶ Gemini; through July 2.)

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)—Stanley Kubrick's slow, precise yet dreamy sci-fi epic. The ponderous, blurry appeal of the picture may be in its mystical vision of a graceful world of space, controlled by superior or godlike minds, where the hero (Keir Dullea) is reborn as an angelic baby. It says that man is just a tiny nothing on the stairway to paradise; something better (i.e., non-human) is coming, and it's all out of your hands anyway. Kubrick's story line—which accounts for evolution by an extraterrestrial intelligence—is probably the most gloriously redundant plot of all time. The sulky, peevish voice of Hal, the computer—the only amusing character, he suggests a rejected homosexual lover—was supplied by Douglas Rain; the soft-spoken cast includes Gary Lockwood, Margaret Tyzack, and Leonard Rossiter. The script is by Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke; the chief cinematographer was Geoffrey Unsworth, with additional work by John Alcott.—P.K. (Biograph Cinema; June 30-July 3.)

What About Bob?—As the character before the question mark—a multiphobic personality looking for a family—Bill Murray is touched not just with an armada of fears and tics but also with comic genius. Bob is a psychiatrist's nightmare, an achingly needy yet cunning patient, and Dr. Leo Marvin (Richard Dreyfuss) is the shrink he's currently haunting, a self-centered psychobabbler concerned with going on vacation and promoting his new book, "Baby Steps." Dreyfuss gives a shrewd, felicitous performance; he knows how to express a control freak's stroked ego with the merest quarter-smile. But the movie is shaped to redeem Bob and to give Leo his comeuppance, reducing Dreyfuss to shrieking fits. Tom Schulman's script (from a story by Alvin Sargent and Laura Ziskin) and Frank Oz's direction lack any sustained tone, including muscle tone. When Bob starts bonding with Leo's kids (Charlie Korsmo, Kathryn Erbe) and wife (Julie Hagerty), Murray's instinctive iconoclasm is all that keeps the film from going completely sentimental and flabby. The way Murray plays Bob, he embodies the ages of man—negatively. He can be alarmingly infantile and pathetically decrepit, and still be adept at getting what he wants. Underneath the gloss of good feeling, Murray conveys the selfishness within his basket case. Murray and Dreyfuss (and the final plot twist) manage to put across the essence of Bob and Leo's relationship: a clash of egomaniacs.—M.S. (Village East Cinemas, Cinema I, 23rd St. West Triplex, 62nd & Broadway, and Embassy.)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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Notes and Comment

SOMEWHERE in the enormous space between the ideals of American democracy and the history of American race relations, the darkest part of the American character long ago formed. That space has narrowed greatly since the days of slavery and the campaigns of extermination against Native Americans, but it remains a zone of fierce hypocrisy and denial. Who remembers that Walt Whitman, the supreme poet of democracy, was at times a white supremacist? In 1858, writing in the Brooklyn *Daily Times*, Whitman applauded the fact that the new state constitution of Oregon excluded blacks, and asked his readers, "Who believes that the Whites and Blacks can ever amalgamate in America? Or who wishes it to happen? Nature has set an impassable seal against it. Besides, is not America for the Whites? And is it not better so?" Many of our Presidents, both before and after the Civil War, along with a solid majority of white Americans, held—and acted on—similar racial views. An amnesia worthy of Kurt Waldheim's Austria seems to blot out whole passages of our national memory (and saying that our white-supremacist forebears were simply "men of their time" raises, like most apologetics, more questions than it answers), and obscures in particular the often close connection between "democratic" populism of the type Whitman celebrated and white racial domination.

A whiff of this amnesia was in the air a few weeks ago when President Bush, in a commencement address at the United States Military Academy, at West Point, got on the subject of race relations, and declared, "Black and white, the great civil-rights leaders of the fifties and sixties deplored intolerance, demanded equality of opportunity and equality under the law." Mr. Bush clearly meant to associate himself with "the great civil-rights leaders of the fifties and sixties." The truth, however, is that Mr. Bush, as a candidate for the Senate from Texas, *opposed* the major legislative achievement of the civil-rights movement—the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed segregated hotels, restaurants, theatres, and other public facilities, helped guarantee the right to vote, and made job discrimination illegal. The President's West Point invocation of the high ideals of the civil-rights movement came, moreover, in the course of a harsh Administration attack on civil-rights legislation that has now been passed by the House of Representatives. Although this legislation has been endorsed by every major civil-rights organization (the bill would make it easier for victims of job discrimination to gain redress), the President termed it a "so-called civil-rights bill," and said that it was in fact "a quota bill." Mr. Bush vetoed similar legislation last year, and has promised to veto this bill if it reaches his desk.

Unlikely as it would have seemed a generation ago, when Barry Goldwater led a Republican Party that was generally hostile to the civil-rights movement, "equality of opportunity" has become, by a curious process, a Republican rallying cry. Governor George Wallace, of Alabama, that hardy populist of the sixties, first discovered the political gold in the white-working-class backlash against the civil-rights movement, and, as Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall noted, writing in *The Atlantic* this spring, "Wallace laid the groundwork for the Republican assault on 'reverse discrimination.' " After Wallace, running as a third-party Presidential candidate in 1968, won almost fourteen per cent of the vote, Richard Nixon set out in 1972 to attract the same disaffected white Southern Democrats who had responded to Wallace's message, and Nixon's success, the Edsalls say, helped create the virtual lock on the White House that the Republicans have enjoyed since. The sudden transformation of the Republican Party's image from a party that had long represented the rich to the party of "equal opportunity" was also helped by Wallace's, and then Nixon's, effective depiction of the Democrats as liberal élitists promoting black interests at the expense of white workers. By 1980, even Ronald Reagan was calling for "equal opportunity."

But there has never been anything resembling genuine equal opportunity for black and white Americans. And anyone who claims that the path to such equality is clear and well lighted today is either dreaming or dissembling. Affirmative-action programs do hurt some whites, and they are broadly unpopular. The mainstream civil-rights organizations have been reduced to tinkering with a bureaucratic machinery that no one really believes is going to produce great changes. The intractability of black poverty, alienation, and segregation becomes steadily more frightening. And yet President Bush rarely shows any grasp of the seriousness of our nation's racial situation. He was willing to play the anti-black race card in his 1988 campaign, and he has been playing it again with his recent crusade against "quotas." Neither does the President show any comprehension of what life might be like on the receiving end of racial injustice. A recent *Newsweek* poll found that a solid majority of black Americans believe that fairness in education, hiring, and promotion cannot be accomplished *without* "quotas." This view, differing so sharply from the white view, might have given the President pause. But in his remarks at West Point he simply accused civil-rights activists of divisiveness. "They would pit one group against another, encourage people to think of others as competitors, not colleagues," he said. Perhaps Mr. Bush truly believes that he knows what blacks need better than they do. But, of course, such remarks are not addressed to blacks. They are addressed primarily to white Americans.

Like other dishonorable traditions, race-based politics must often be carried on by indirection—by speaking in code ("equality of opportunity") and disguising itself. Thus, the version of American history which justifies the Bush Administration's indifference to civil rights is not only whitewashed but truncated. In this version, the struggle for racial equality is basically over, and little, if anything, more needs to be done. "We must think of ourselves not as colors or numbers but as Americans, as bearers of sacred values," Mr. Bush told the graduates at West Point. This kind of formulation conceals more than it reveals. Unless we begin with where and who we really are—and where and who we have really been—we will never find our way out of here.

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Levels of New York

"Bonwit Teller Leaves Manhattan—for Syracuse" is a headline for which even a close reading of Nostradamus had not prepared us. We brooded over the history of Bonwit Teller in New York. We thought about how splendid its big building had been, and how sad we were back in 1978 to see it come down. But that wasn't the worst. It is a dramatic and community-forming moment when a big building actually comes down in New York. It reminds you of all the other buildings that have come down, and it gives you a sense of opulence through profligacy. And then you can get ready for the fun of deploring what is to go up. So the demolition of the old store wasn't the worst—it was just a level of bad. And a couple of years later Bonwit's opened its modest new building, only a few yards away. But the store has left us for *Syracuse*. There is no fun in that.

And now Paris has come. Galeries Lafayette, the big store in Paris, gave a kind of breakfast party the other day on the site of the "new" Bonwit's to announce that they are renovating that space and will occupy it. You want to run to the management of Bonwit's in Syracuse (and we hope it's having a very good time under the Carrier Dome) and say, "You didn't want us, but Paris did."

"But who are Galeries Lafayette in Paris?" we asked a snobbish friend.

"Between Macy's and Bloomingdale's," our friend told us.

"What an awkward place," we said.

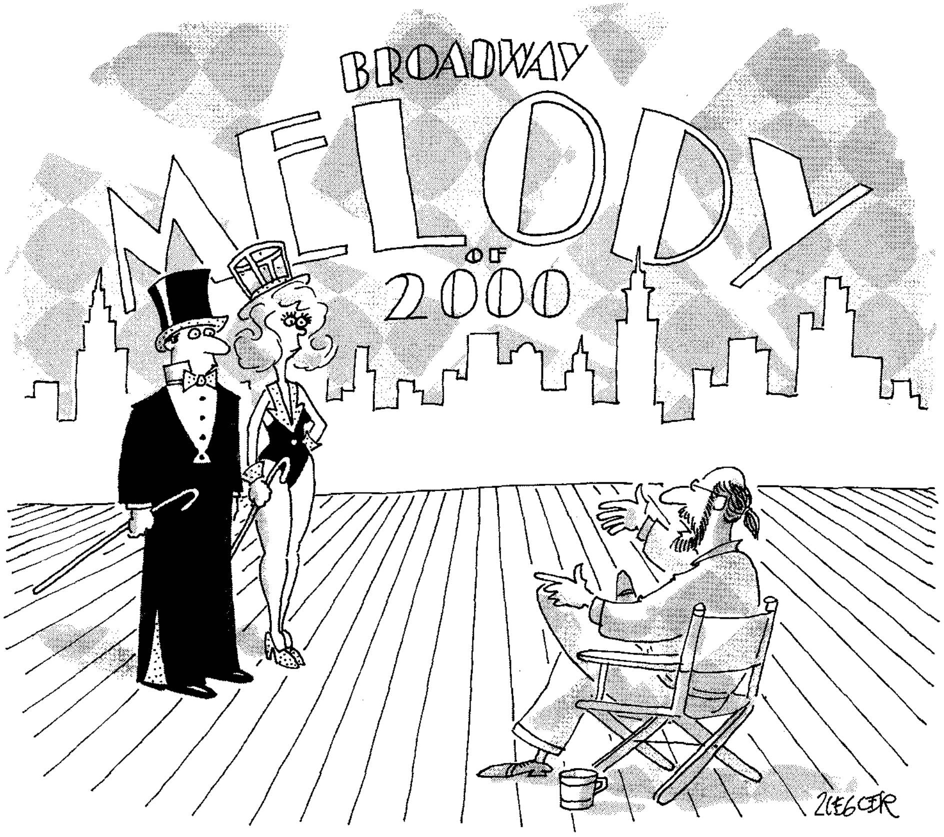
"Well, they're not like Bloomingdale's, because they don't cater to someone like me," our friend said. "They have a little pizzazz, a little flair for the shopping working girl, but they're not low-priced. On the ground floor, there are one million shops for accessories, and then you go up a floor or two and you can find washing-machine parts, if that's what you want, and you can't do that at Bloomingdale's. On the other hand, the washing-machine parts aren't allowed to spoil the fun. I mean, you are well dressed and you happen to be in the mood for washing-machine parts. You aren't *of* washing-machine parts when you buy them. That's the appeal."

d. ehrenberg

With all this in mind, we went off to the breakfast, which was to feature Mayor Dinkins saying, Thank you, thank you, for rescuing us from the humiliation of not having anything to take the place of the store that jilted us for the mailman. We repeated over and over to ourself, "You aren't *of* washing-machine parts when you buy them. That's the appeal." On Fifty-seventh Street, there was a party-rental truck with a pink hippopotamus on it. There was a woman in black tights and a mustard-colored overblouse walking a Labrador retriever. There were some physical facts to take note of, but the most important thing that happened was that we were overwhelmed by this feeling we will call "French Without Tears—in a Way." All at once, everything asked or demanded that we do things like *not* be so vulgar as to buy blouse and skirt from the same designer, and absolutely, positively use accessories in the French manner, to add a cutting edge of temporary chic to a layer of permanent style. "It's certainly true that French women rely on clever accessories to help create their statement," said one document that was thrust into our hands. We read on. "Belts, watches or chains are artfully arranged. The scarf is casually tied, rather than tortuously knotted. The total effect is spontaneous." Ah, we thought. In Syracuse, their scarves are tortuously knotted. Belts, watches, and chains are worn like so many manacles.

We go into the building. This is where the cosmetics department will be. We pass through an area dominated by giant sketches done by a Swede, Mats Gustafson. Why had we thought that everyone named Mats would be a tennis player? Why had it not occurred to us that a fellow named Mats could paint giant sketches of women—black and French blue—against a background of white? We see some big tables. One table has plastic hard hats on it. They say "Galeries Lafayette" in aqua. There are work lights shining over our head and white duck cloth under our feet.

Farther along, there are twenty-five little round tables with white tablecloths down to the white duck. On each table is either a silver or a black thermos and a bouquet of flowers. The waiters wear white hard hats, white jackets, and black trousers. The jackets



"O.K., Steve, Act One—the go-go eighties. Yuppies, Wall Street, the penthouse on Park, that sort of thing. Act Two—the nineties. Recession, depression, banks going under, blah, blah, blah. You and Denise are out on the street. Act Three—ba-da-boom! Suddenly it's the fin de siècle!"

and the trousers don't look as if they had necessarily come from the same designer. The look is good, in our opinion. No tortuously knotted scarves—just a good, solid waiter look, with the clever, and economical, addition of a white plastic hard hat. If there are belts and chains, they are kept tactfully out of view. Right now, the waiters are guarding clear pitchers of things to drink: Perrier, orange juice, grapefruit juice, iced tea.

"What do you do when you're not doing this?" we ask one waiter.

"I'm a director. I've done a show downtown called 'Captive.' "

People spoke. M. Georges Meyer, the chairman and C.E.O. of Galeries Lafayette, spoke. Mayor Dinkins spoke. He said something in French—nice accent, but it didn't get any applause. He made a reference to the Marine Corps, and that brought down the house. "On a very practical level, we appreciate the jobs that your presence here creates," he said. But he wasn't all practicality. For example, he used the terms "charm," "grace," "romance," "savoir-faire." He did not use the terms "driven," "work yourself to death," "guttural speech," so one knew where in Europe one was.

We talked to Marianne Millies-Lacroix, the fashion director of Galeries Lafayette New York, about the puzzling business of dressing like the French. "It's very easy," she said. "Not *too* much accessory. Mix color. Wear Sonia with Et Vous. If you are willing, we can help you."

And then we talked to John Kelleher, the general superintendent of Herbert Construction, which is supervising the renovation. He pointed overhead. "That's ductwork—heat and air-conditioning," he said. "As soon as this party breaks up, we'll put black iron on the pencil rod. After that, Chicago bar clips go on the black iron—that's what supports the ceiling."

"What's the floor really like?"

"Terrazzo finish. It's in."

"Have you done other work like this?"

"Bulgari, Fendi, Bergdorf Men. We've been around."

Mr. Kelleher had what looked like tattoos on one arm—an accessory you can't change.

"Are those real tattoos?" we asked.

"They don't come off," he said.

Then we talked to a woman who has, in the recent past, been in Paris. "Do French women really look French in France?" we asked.

"No one knows where the well-dressed women have gone or where the haircuts have gone," she said. "No one made me look twice."

"Didn't you see anyone in Paris you were jealous of?"

"Two women in their seventies walking their dogs. They wore really good clothes."

Dead Heat

THIS session, the New Jersey State Legislature got bogged down in trying to name the official state fish. Debate has also raged on bills, still pending, proposing the blueberry as the state fruit, the tomato as the state vegetable, and "Washington Crossing the Delaware" as the state painting. New Jersey already has a state dinosaur, *Hadrosaurus foulkii*, and a state bug, the honeybee, which is listed in the "Legislative Manual" with this caveat: "Despite the official designation, scientists do not classify the bee as a bug." According to the manual, New Jersey also has, if not a state song, a reigning would-be state songwriter, Red Mascara, who has been lobbying for more than thirty years on behalf of his tune "I'm from New Jersey."

Red's campaign relies heavily on passing out gumdrops to everyone at the State House—from guards to legislators—once a week. "I'm from New Jersey" has come to a vote several times, and in 1972 it passed both houses, but Governor Cahill vetoed it, because he didn't feel that it enjoyed "wide public support." Nevertheless, and despite an occasional rival (there was a short-lived movement in favor of Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run"), nobody had ever really challenged Red's status as almost official songwriter. Until now, that is. Angelo Nigro, a mailman from Elizabeth, has written a song called "New Jersey (the State for Me and You)," which he hopes will blast Red's tune out of the water.

The other day, we dropped by the Hillside post office, where Angelo works—and where his song is displayed prominently beside the Zip Code directory—and a colleague of Angelo's drove us out to join Angelo midroute. Angelo was waiting at a curb with a friend, David Taub, who is a real-estate agent and a guiding star of the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame. David Taub said of Angelo's song, "It's the best I've ever heard, and I've been in show business all my life." Then he said, "Hey, Angelo, what time is this going to finish, because I've got to sell a house." He was referring to performances of the song which Angelo had scheduled at a bank and at an office nearby. Playing the song for people along his route, and also before gatherings of groups like the Knights of Columbus, is Angelo's primary way of being heard. Sometimes he brings Italian cookies. Early this year, he played the song before the Assembly, and the Speaker rated it a "10," but said it was hard to dance to.

We followed Angelo to the bank, and watched him set up a boom box on the desk of a platform assistant and work the crowd, of about seven. (A teller asked "Any mail for me today?" and he said "You know I'm the only male for you.") Then he pressed a button and the song burst forth, starting with

New Jersey, New Jersey,
The state for me and you.
New Jersey, New Jersey,
So much to see and do,

and finishing with

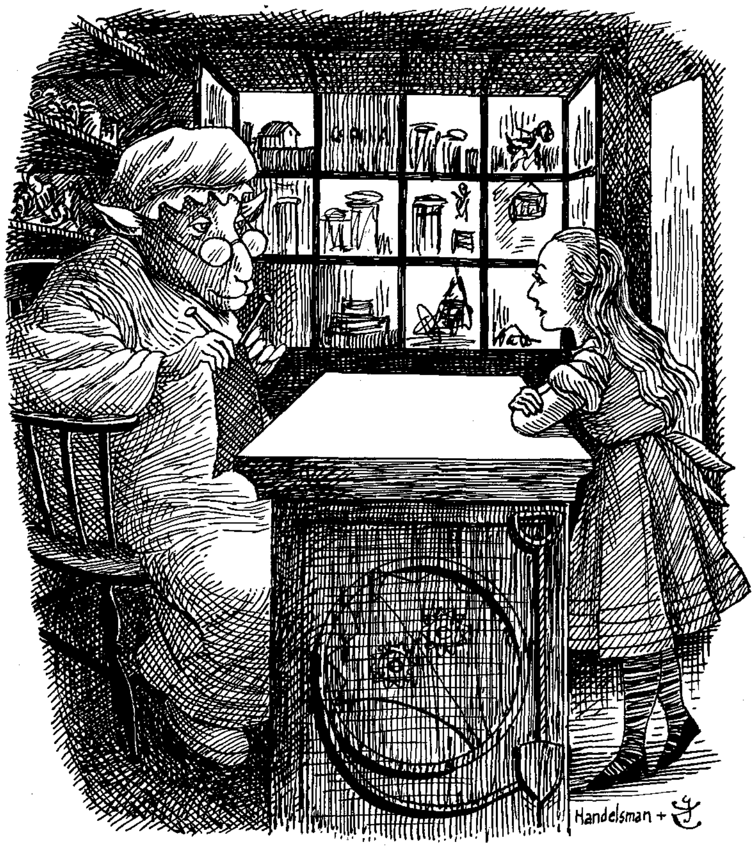
Garden State Parkway
And Turnpike, too.
New Jersey, New Jersey,
The state for me and you.

Everyone said it was very nice.

A few days later, we went to the State House Annex, to see how Red Mascara was holding up under the pressure from Angelo. Over coffee in the cafeteria, he told us, with an air of noblesse oblige, that he had nothing to say about Angelo. But he had this to say about himself: "You can say that I am a songwriter who never had a big hit, although a song I wrote with my partner in 1956, 'Seek, Seek, Seek,' was recorded by Red Benson, an m.c. of 'Name That Tune.' " He also said that, despite the remark made by Governor Cahill in 1972, "I'm from New Jersey" did in fact enjoy "wide public support," including that of a hundred or so municipalities and organizations, like the Loyal Order of Moose, Lodge No. 512, and that the song had continued to gain support; in 1979, for example, it was the theme song in the campaign of Miss New Jersey Teen U.S.A. to become Miss Teen U.S.A.

Red rattled off the strengths of his song: "One, you can put the name of your town in the song where 'New Jersey' is and make it municipal. Two, the phrase 'I'm from New Jersey' can be used on license plates or stamped on envelopes and packages going out of state. It adapts itself as a stamp of approval or recognition. Three, let's tear the song apart, line by line. 'I'm from New Jersey and I'm proud about it. I love the Garden State.' Is there anything wrong with that? No. Everyone wants to say it. 'I'm from New Jersey and I want to shout it. I think it's simply great.' Anything wrong with that?"

Red showed us the packet that he gives to every new legislator; it contains the Assembly and Senate bills sponsoring "I'm from New Jersey," and a 45-r.p.m. recording of it. He gave us a copy of the sheet music, which has a picture on the cover of Frank Sinatra, winking. Red told us that all his songs were written with Frank in mind. This one had actually been recorded by a group named the Chordblenders, he added, but it wouldn't have been appropriate to put them on the cover, because they were from Pennsylvania.



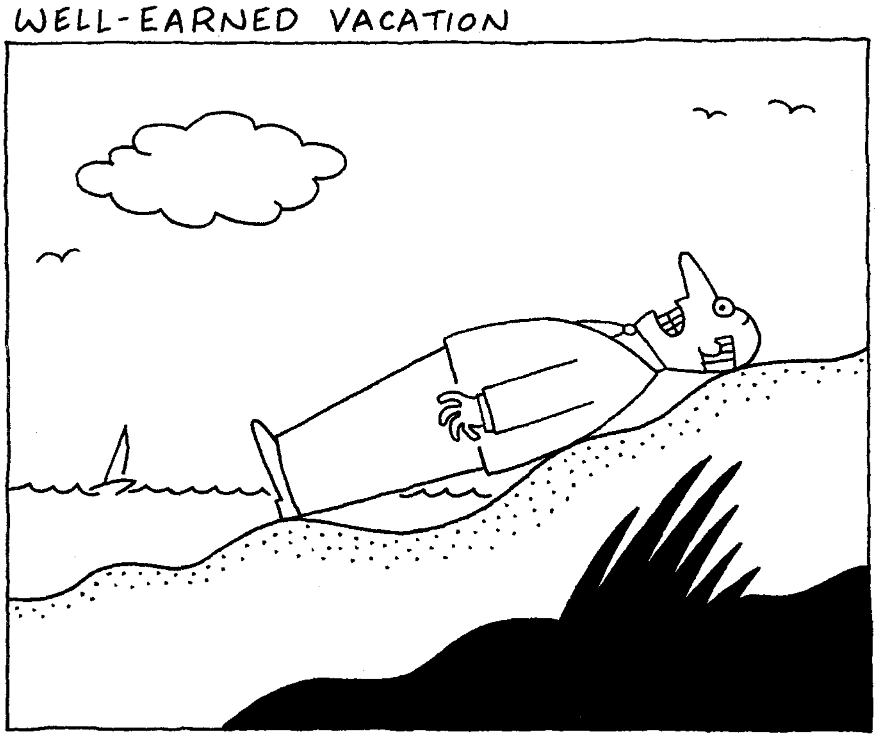
"I should like to buy a handgun while it is still legal," said Alice very gently.

Ticker Tape

A FRIEND writes:

Why was I attending a celebration for a war I didn't believe in? I went for the hoopla. I went to see the paper blizzard. I went to catch sight of summer winds whipping through lower Broadway and spinning litter into cyclones. I went because I imagined going might help me understand Desert Storm. On the subway downtown, I bumped into a well-tailored middle-aged man who had what used to be called a big corporation. The car was filled with people headed for the parade. As the train rattled along, the man buttonholed me and said that during the Second World War he'd served in the Navy. He had come home from the Pacific theatre to a rousing, hero's welcome. It was wonderful, he said, to see this kind of patriotism "resurge." The man added, "After Vietnam, there were so many negatives."

It seems to me that the country has done a pretty good job lately of editing the negatives out. Take the "frozen zone" the police set up around



the anti-war demonstrators at the parade. There couldn't have been more than a few hundred of the demonstrators—in two groups, on opposite sides of Broadway. The National Coalition to Stop U.S. Intervention in the Middle East staked out the west corner of Vesey Street. A smaller band, some wearing Arab costumes, was across the street. Scores of police stood shoulder to shoulder along Broadway, keeping the press and pro-war public at bay. There were uniformed cops and plainclothes cops and detectives and community-affairs officers and special-security-squad members with still and videotape cameras. I managed to sneak close enough to the demonstrators to make out what some posters said ("Heros Don't Murder Civilians" and "What's There to Celebrate? 200,000 Dead") and to hear several chants ("Down with the Parade of Shame" and "Baghdad is Everywhere. We Are All Iraqis"). But then a sergeant chased me away.

Not much of this seemed to make the evening news. What we saw on television was a happier event. The televised parade looked huge (although the crowd was not quite the police department's estimate of four million seven hundred thousand) and jolly under a sky full of washy, diorama clouds. The city had repainted the center line of Broadway a baby blue with yellow ribbon bows, and cameramen that day tended to pan up from the ribbons and into the crowd, where young girls vied with each other to pose alongside marines, and young boys wearing combat fatigues flashed "V" signs, and young women shrieked "All the way, U.S.A!"

I hadn't gone to write about the parade. But some things stayed with me. The red-white-and-blue 1959 Cadillac convertibles carrying Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, and Norman Schwarzkopf put me in mind of a postcard I own that shows former Miss America Tawny Godin riding in state. The hunted-looking security men trotting alongside the motorcade made me think of the famous Zapruder film. The announcer broadcasting near the reviewing stand spoke in the promotional tones of a Monty Hall. "General Norman Schwarzkopf was born in Trenton, New Jersey," he chirped. Come on down!

When the first platoons of soldiers strode north, around noon, they passed a block-lettered sign at the bottom of City Hall Park that signalled the order "Eyes Right." Many of them were already covered with paper. I saw one soldier sporting a huge fright wig of streamers, and another with an envelope stuck to his face. I saw a Patriot Missile on a truck sponsored by Raytheon, with a G.I. on board hugging the weapon with one arm and holding a Teddy bear in the other. I saw a dump truck marked "Sanitation" carrying pool photographers. And I saw a man waving to the crowd from the back seat of a jeep. A sign on the car identified him as an "Ex POW." From the reviewing stand Senator Alfonse D'Amato and Manhattan City Council President Andrew Stein and Manhattan D.A. Robert Morgenthau held their hands up stiffly and waved to the man in a way that put me in mind of the waxwork notables at Madame Tussaud's. I saw a band of young marines march past in Ruritanian costumes of scarlet coats with brass buttons and white braid, and behind them came a bent old warrior at the head of a separate column.

When I looked south on Broadway, I caught sight of the Fuji Film blimp floating across the horizon, its bow tilted jauntily downward. For a second, it looked like something tossed out of a window. The blimp took some of the martial edge off the occasion, and helped me realize that what I was looking at was actually a merchandising display: a nation-wide fire sale of patriotism. David Dinkins ambled past then, wearing a windbreaker and a baseball cap, on his way to the reviewing stand. He seemed pretty casual, as if he'd just got off the subway. That relieved me, since under the circumstances he could as easily have elected to arrive on a palanquin.

About two hours into the parade I felt a sharp rap on my skull. Instinctively, I ducked and looked around, and saw no one. That is, I saw millions of people but no obvious culprit. Then I sighted the soldier. He was orange plastic, about two inches high, and was attached to a paper parachute. To judge by the impact, someone had sailed him from a high floor of the Woolworth Building, along with some of the eighty-seven tons of shredded Xerox paper and business envelopes and confetti and newsprint and computer fan sheets that the Department of Sanitation later estimated had gone into the parade. I lifted the parachute up and saw that someone had written a message on the inside. It read, "Murder is murder. No matter how you celebrate it." I put the soldier in my pocket and decided it was time to go home.

FATAL WISH

"Do you want me to disqualify myself," Ilka asked Director Leslie Shakespere, "because I know James?"

The other members of the Concordance Institute kept turning the pages of the candidate's vita on the table before them, but their ears pricked up. It was understood that the young man had stayed the night in Ilka's little rented house, and they had been rather wondering.

Ilka had picked Jimmy up accidentally at her very first New York party, to which she had come with another man, with whom she had been falling in love. This man's name was Carter—a large, stout, distinguished black man, in his fifties, and ill. When he walked off to get himself a drink, Ilka stood and watched a bespectacled man who held his head at an excruciating angle, pretending to be reading the spines of the books on the glass shelving. He was, like Ilka herself, young, thin, Jewish, and embarrassed. He appeared to be alone. It was because he did not attract her that Ilka had smiled at him, and because she wanted to practice her English she asked him if he was a friend of the bride or the groom. The young man's left brow contracted over his left eye, his nostrils dilated, his lips parted, he spoke. He told Ilka the dates from and until which he and the groom had interned for which Washington congressman. Ilka kept trying to remember who it was that this young man reminded her of. She thought it was someone she didn't much care for, and so she said, "I must go and search my friend," but the young man had kept at her side, never to be lost again.

The first several times he called he had been obliged to identify himself. "James Carl. Jimmy. Remember me from Philip and Fanny's wedding?"

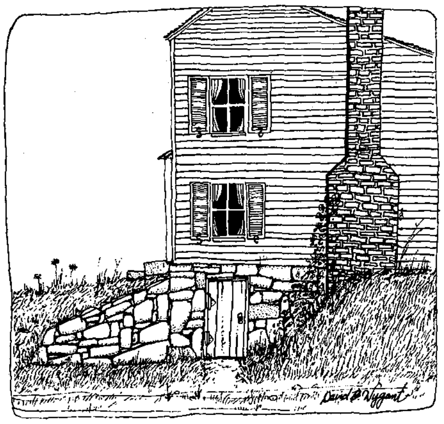
He happened to call the day they took Carter to the state hospital. James took Ilka to the corner Chinese restaurant. Ilka sat and studied the oversized menu, looked up, and there, across the table from her, sat a young man! Jimmy Carl from Philip and Fanny's wedding! His left brow contracted, his nostrils dilated, his lips parted: Ilka leaned all her attentive interest and then some across the table so that the young man would not notice that she had forgotten all about him.

Poor Jimmy Carl had just got fired from his job. "The president called me into his office. The president is my mother's cousin."

"And he fired you?"

"He had his reasons," said Jimmy Carl. "There's a man, Stackport—looks like he's got a case of permanent morning mouth. He files at the file next to my file. He files a file; he files another file, and another file. I thought, I can go faster than that if I put the files on my lap, pick the top one up with my right hand while I get the next ready with my left, which doesn't leave a hand to scratch my nose with. Boredom is really interesting, actually: you have a stuffed head, a pain between the shoulders, pins and needles in the right foot, and an itchy nose. How do you know that that's boredom?

"This is two minutes to eleven! Ninety-two minutes before I get to meet you for lunch." James blushed. He said, "I thought, If I file fifteen files without looking at the clock it'll be eleven. Then I thought, I'll file fifteen *more* files, and it'll maybe already be two minutes *past* eleven! I look, and the clock says *one* minute *to* eleven. Which is interesting. I've gotten as close as a human being gets to what eternity feels like: I can't imagine a minute that doesn't have an end, but I *can* imagine an endless number of endless minutes filing—a sneak preview of Hell, which is a fascinating concept for human beings to have come up with to scare ourselves with. So I turn my head and I rub my nose on my shoulder and feel my files going into a slide. Imagine an eternal moment of embarrassment: Mr. Stackport has stopped filing; Mrs. Winters—she's the office manager—swivels her chair and looks at me; the typewriters stop; somebody giggles. Mr. Stackport is getting down on his knees, which is sort of wonderful, really—an adult male in his sixties, children, grandchildren, I wouldn't wonder, who takes home a fraction of what Cousin Robert makes, and he's red in the face because Cousin Robert's files are all over the office floor! He says, 'How come you didn't put a blue label on Kux, Bloch, & Co.? Kux, Bloch is inactive!'



"And Cousin Robert, too! I could see he *minded* the inactive files being filed with the active!"

"Was that terrible, to be fired?"

"Yes. Well, no, actually, it was interesting. Poor Robert. I can always talk rings around Cousin Robert."

Carter came out of the hospital and went back in. Jimmy got a junior job writing up reports for the Civil Liberties Union, from which he did not get fired. Why was Ilka surprised? Jimmy said it was really interesting. Whenever Carter had some new trouble, Ilka called Jimmy Carl and they had long conversations. It was Jimmy who came to the station when Ilka finally saw her friend Carter off to the West Coast.

For a time Ilka and James slept together. James was a friendly, enthusiastic lover. Ilka was surprised that inside his narrow suit Jimmy was nicely put together. It wasn't his fault that Ilka's arms and heart were used to encompassing more bulk.

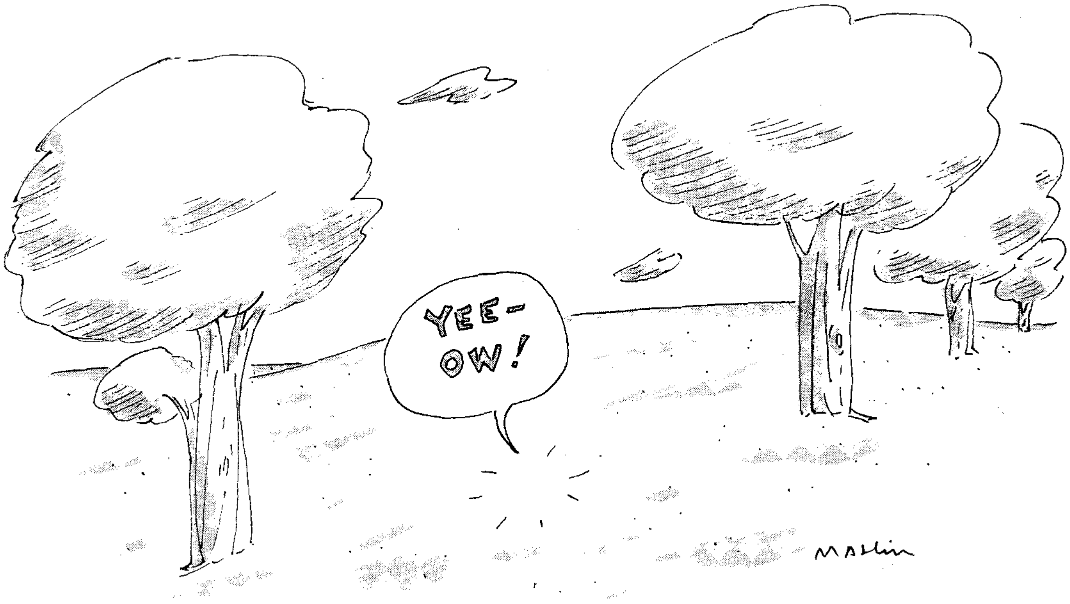
James was transferred to Washington and was shocked when he understood Ilka wasn't coming along. His left brow frowned, his nostrils flared, his lips parted, and he said, "Interesting how impossible it is to really believe one isn't going to get something one really wants!"

Ilka suddenly asked him if he'd ever been on TV.

"When I was a student at Columbia. One of those conscientious Sunday-morning dialogues."

"You sat on the left," Ilka said.

"This is incredible!" said Jimmy. "I mean this is way before I even knew you!"



THE INVISIBLE MAN RUNS INTO AN INVISIBLE FENCE.

"I can't remember what you were talking about," said Ilka. What Ilka remembered was that the boy on the left, who turned out after all those years to have been Jimmy, said all the things that Ilka would have said, and that they had sounded tiresome. While the boy on the right spoke, the camera had panned to the disagreement expressed by the left boy. His face filled the screen, squared off above the left-sided frown and below the lips drawn apart by that unlucky trick the muscles of the cheek played on the wings of the nose. Ilka swore it in her heart: Jimmy would never, never, never know that years before she met him she had got out of her bed, walked over to the television, and turned him off.

"WHY won't you marry me?" whined James whenever he flew in from Washington.

"Because," Ilka routinely answered, "you don't ask me if I will but why I won't."

"So will you?"

"Don't be silly."

Then James would tell Ilka what was wrong with his latest Washington woman, and Ilka was bemused to diagnose in herself the ghost of jealousy. Ilka tended to like the women James brought to New York, and to be surprised that these conversable women should like James, till she remembered that she, Ilka, liked James, too.

Over the next several years James expanded. The shoulders had more substance. There was more *of* James front to back. Why was Ilka surprised when James began to publish his articles and essays?

ILKA received an appointment as a junior associate at the Concordance Institute and moved to Connecticut. Jimmy phoned. He'd seen the institute's ad for a director of projects. How would Ilka feel if he applied?

"But I thought you liked it at the A.C.L.U.!"

"I'll love it at the Concordance Institute."

"Jimmy, what do you know about developing conferences? What do you know about organizing things? And what do you know about the 'Who's Who in the World'?"

"Zilch, zilch, and zilch," said Jimmy.

Jimmy drove up from Washington to be interviewed. The Shakesperes had a reception for him. Ilka looked across the room. She watched Leslie introduce James around, saw James's brow contract and his nostrils dilate, and walked out into the kitchen.

"We like your friend," Eliza Shakespere said.

"You do?" marvelled Ilka.

"He lives such an interesting life," Eliza said. "At the moment of his death James will be thinking, Fascinating concept, dying!"

Leslie came in for drinks and said, "I like James. He talks a lot like you do."

"I know! I know!" Ilka said.

IT would be dastardly to stand in the way of a friend's career because one preferred to have him off in Washington. Recognizing the conflict of her interest, Ilka had asked Leslie if she should disqualify herself.

"Oh, I don't think so," replied Leslie. "Joe, you and I didn't disqualify ourselves from co-opting each other."

Joe said, "No friends, no institute!"

"Zack?" Leslie said.

Zack said, "What makes this candidate think he knows how to run projects like ours?"

"Nobody knows how to run projects like ours," said Alvin.

Alvin was a huge old man with a massive head of white hair in a state of happy revolt. "I pass Alvin on the stairs and there's this cheerful whoosh," Ilka had said to the Shakesperes at Sunday breakfast in Eliza's kitchen, which was suffused with green garden light.

Eliza had said, "It comes from believing the world is going to shape up, and Alvin knows exactly the shape that it ought to be. Alvin knows the revolution that would do it if Zachariah would stop just standing there. Poor Zack! His nose grows right in the middle of his face."

Ilka and Leslie had laughed. "That's true! It does!" they said.

Leslie said, "You leave Zack alone. I never hear better sense than I do from Zachariah."

"He has a mouth like a keyhole," said Eliza Shakespere.

Ilka grieved at the prospect, if James got hired, of having to share the Shakesperes and Eliza's kitchen.

"Will there be a battle?" asked Eliza.

"Sure," said Leslie.

"I haven't been here long enough

AFTER K. 452

In conversation, even
determined admirers could discover
"*absolutely no sign of unusual*
powers of intellect, and almost no
trace of culture"; Ludwig Tieck,
prompted to rekindle impressions cold
some fifty years, contrived to produce
for listeners longing to be misled
no more winning depiction
of the Meister he had famously known
than these infamous words: "He was small, swift
of movement, with a stupid expression."
Centuries on, we have made
him out to be giddy, extravagant,
and judging from his letters (even to
his mother!) gratuitously obscene. . . .
Gleeful though, positively
exultant when it came to his exploits:
"I personally regard the quintet,"
he wrote from Vienna to Leopold,
"as the best thing that I have
so far composed in my life."
He would compose things farther in that life,
but "so far" puzzles. How much did he know,
this master of time, or how ignorant
could he be at 28?
Soon he would fall much too ill not to have
all the symptoms of perfect refinement—
though anything but "refined"; nor ever
be sufficiently "adult"
to remain unproductive for the next
(the last) seven years—though how hard
he would find it to be shallow enough
for a polite audience!
But I believe he knew what he had to make,
and when the solitude would cease. The worst
thing about his death was the disrespect,
vulgarity, meanness. . . .
God should have arranged for Mozart dying
to vanish—dissolve like a puff of smoke!
(One among many pieces of advice
I could have passed on to Him.)

—RICHARD HOWARD

• •

to understand what's behind what everyone says," said Ilka. "I wish somebody would tell me the stories of all the skeletons."

Leslie said, "You'd be disappointed. They're not sinister."

"Yet I suspect that they reach their hands out of their closets and determine everything that everybody argues and how everybody votes."

"That's probably true," said Leslie.

"Well," Ilka had said, "we're all of us guaranteed to do our usual numbers."

ALVIN's number, at Monday morning's meeting, was to get young James on board; Zachariah's was to hold the strict line. Zack said, "For James Carl to agree to organize international conferences is worrisomely naïve or, more worrisomely, misleading." It was said with such venom that Ilka looked up. She intercepted the look Zack and Yvette refrained from exchanging with each other. Ilka understood that they were—"in cahoots" was putting it too strongly—that they had talked the matter over, as they had every right to do, or, rather, that they had no need to talk to come out on the same side of this and every other question that was put before them. Ilka deduced some naked, old granddaddy of a skeleton.

A pause. The members turned the pages of the candidate's vita. Those who, for their own reasons, had prejudged the matter on one side or the other wished to be observed being judicious, or waited for new ammunition. Those who didn't care one way or the other waited to see what they were going to think.

Alpha Stone said, "Perhaps the administrator should have clarified our requirements. The administrator goofed." Everybody smiled. The goofer was Alpha.

Zachariah said, "I asked James what he knew about computers, and he said, and I quote, 'Zilch.'"

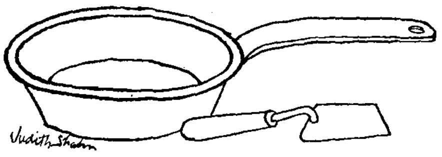
"Which is par for the rest of us," said Alvin.

"Which is Zack's point," said Yvette.

"So? The Computer Center people will come in and brief him."

Leslie said, "I see Zack's hand, I see Yvette, I see Alpha, I see Joe, whom I will take first because I've not heard from him yet." He wrote the names in order on a piece of paper. "Joe?"

Joe Bernstine had no axe of his own unless it was assisting Leslie to get what Leslie wanted, and Joe was right in thinking Leslie wanted the young man hired. Joe said, "How many of *us* have published four articles this year?"



"Yes, but where?" Yvette named a popular journal with the expression of *one dangling a dead thing by its disagreeable tail.*

"There are those among us," Alpha said, and refrained from exchanging a look with Alvin, and neither looked at Yvette, "who publish nothing at all."

A skeleton had put its foot in its mouth.

"He doesn't have a book," Zack said.

"He says it needs time to simmer."

"Since when do we hire people who don't have a book?"

"Since I was outvoted, on this very issue, in this very room, in the case of another candidate!" Everyone except Yvette knew Alpha meant Yvette.

"Ilka," Leslie said.

Ilka's number was to bring into discussion what she believed to be the heart of every matter, and which, she knew, always seemed either a given or an irrelevancy to everybody else: "Where's it written that everybody has to have a book?"

"Ilka, in our bylaws," Joe Bernstine said.

"Who made the bylaws?"

"The board of governors did, Ilka!"

Joseph Farris

• •

"From whom did the board of governors derive its bylaw-making powers?"

"Ilka, from the founders. From Leslie and me," Joe said.

"Who gave it to you and Leslie so you could give it to them?"

"*Oy*, Ilka!"

"No, wait: Say my bell rings. Outside stand the two policemen who might always be standing outside when the doorbell rings. The policemen have come to haul me to the police station, very appropriately—say I've trashed my rented house. Suppose I say to them, 'I'll go to the police station with you as soon as you have shown me from whom you derive your power to haul me there.' "

"They took it and everything else away from the Indians!" said Alvin, and he did look happy.

"Wait! Who gave it to the Indians so it could be taken away from them?"

"Christ, Ilka!"

"*Aawoooooo*," suddenly howled Nathan Cone, the institute's poet, who had been jotting in the margins of Jimmy's vita. He stood straight up and shouted, "What right do we think we have to pin down some poor sod's thoughts that he should be sleeping on nights under his pillow and wrestling with all the while we're chatting him up. I mean *what* in hell do we think we're talking *about!*" And, the purple draining from his face, Nat sat down and wrote himself a note in the bottom margin.

Leslie asked if there was any more discussion. Everybody looked at everybody else. Everybody looked tired. Leslie asked for a motion to vote, and the little blank papers were sent up each side of the table.

Jimmy Carl's move to Concordance, Connecticut, coincided with the return of Ilka's landlords, the Rasmussens. Ilka had assumed she was going to buy a house but got frightened and rented from another couple on another sabbatical. Jimmy's things moved in, right along with Ilka's.

Ilka was not sorry. It was dear to wake with a male and human body asleep in her bed, on the window side, or not asleep after all. Submerged in that gorgeous commotion, Ilka remembered how really fond she was of poor old actual James with his ribs and collarbone and too many elbows.

They were having a hilarious breakfast, deciding if the kitchen was the yellow of pure yolk or of scrambled eggs, when Wendy called. Wendy was Alpha's assistant. Alpha had to catch the nine-thirty flight to New York. Could James make it to an eight-o'clock meeting in Leslie's office? It was high time to get started on the conference on international genocide. James might want to bring his list of prospective participants.

"What list? Which conference is this?" Jimmy asked Ilka. "Which is Leslie's office?"

Ilka stayed in to get the house moved into. She called James midmorning. "Where, if you were the kind of person who had an egg-colored kitchen, would you be likely to keep your coffee filters?"

James said, "In the cupboard? I don't know, Ilka."

Ilka called ten minutes later. "They were in the drawer with the baby-bottle nipples, an expired card from the New York Public Library, the negatives of somebody's wedding. . . ."

"Ilka . . ." said Jimmy.

Ilka said, "Do you think you get insight into someone's soul by knowing where they put things, where you would never think of putting them? Are there species of people who put jars—jam, honey, mustard, chutney—on the same shelf, and others who sort them according to sweet and savory?"

"Ilka, I've got the computer man here."

"Oh! Sorry! I'll see you in the conference room at lunch."

"I'll see you, Ilka."

The computer man was a giant—Nordic, shoulders like Thor, hair like sunshine, welkin-eyed, nervous tic at the left corner of his mouth. He said, "This is your manuals."

Jimmy hefted them. He said, "I can't start a thing until I get my desk cleared of these humongous directories and little bits of paper, memos, whatnot. Can the computer make me a list of prospective participants according to their disciplines, with names, addresses, and credentials?"

"You have to delimit the fields for your values, key in your codes, and enter your data."

"What's your name?" Jimmy asked the computer giant.

"Sweng."

"I'm Jimmy." Jimmy said, "Sweng, do you know Turkish?"

"No," said Sweng.

Jimmy said, "And I don't know how to turn what you just said into what I am supposed to do." Jimmy sat down in the chair still warm from the computer giant's person and asked, "How do I enter?"

"You got to turn it on," said Sweng.

The switch looked like all the switches in James's life. He turned it on and the screen engendered a lowercase "b" that repeated itself to the rightmost margin, skipped left, filled the next line also and continued down the screen like this:

```
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bbbb . . .
```

"What did I do wrong?" cried James. "Did I ruin it?"

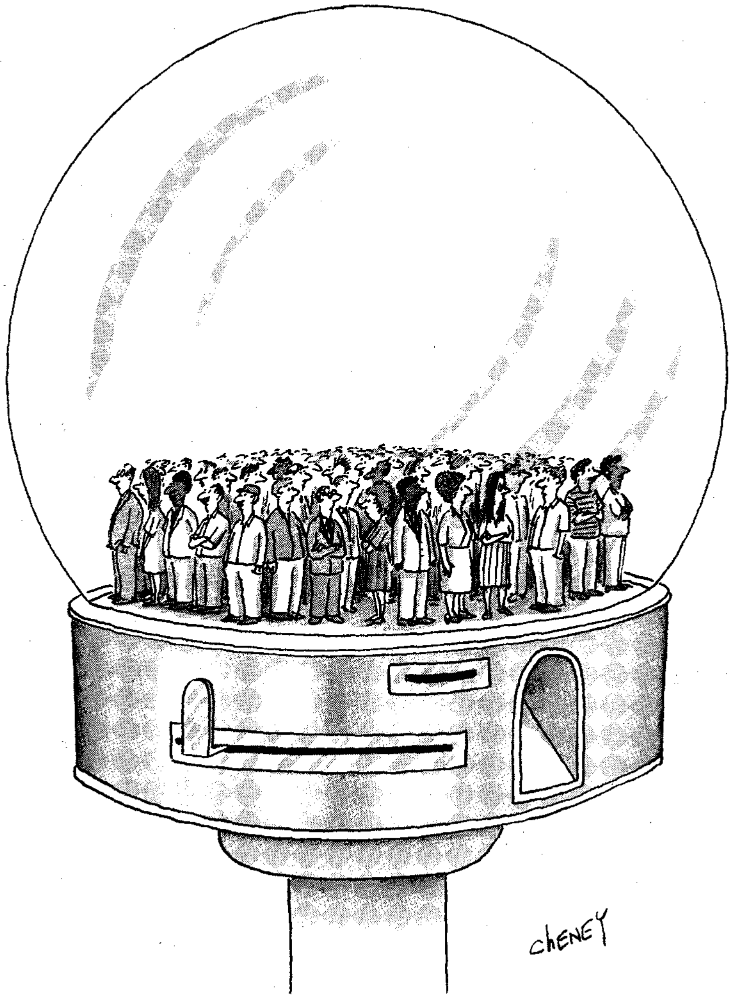
"Let me," Sweng said. Jimmy got gratefully out of the hot seat. Sweng punched a frontal button. The witchery ceased.

"What did you do?" cried James. "Should I have known how to do that? *Now* what are you doing?" But answer came there none. The computer man punched keys, gazed into the responding screen, punched, gazed, punched. Useless for Jimmy to call to him out of our common world, "I wish you would tell me what you're doing!" The computer man's soul had entered the computer.

Jimmy watched and waited till the man rejoined himself, rose, and said, "You're O.K. now. Call the Computer Center if you have a question."

"Don't leave me!" cried James, but the computer giant ducked his head and cleared the door of Jimmy's office.

"I LIKE it!" James reported to the conference table, where all the institute people brought their democratic lunches. "I'm typing in lights! Words stay forever changeable, like my mind! I love it when the screen produces a ghost line. You know how you know it's a ghost line?"



"It doesn't throw a shadow?" asked Alpha.

"It can't see itself in the mirror?" suggested Leslie.

"Little dogs bark at it?" proposed Ilka.

"Close! The little blinking cursor won't move along the ghost line; it moves only along the true line. That's sort of wonderful!"

Jimmy had mislaid his office, so Ilka walked him back. She laughed the third time they met on the stairs. It turned out that James was looking for the corridor that led to her office to ask her, "What's the name of what's-his-name's assistant?"

Martin Moses turned out to be who Jimmy was looking for. "Which one is he?"

"Tall, funny. You talked with him for half an hour at the Shakesperes' reception."

"I talked with a lot of funny people. Whose assistant did you say he is?"

"Zack's."

"Which one is Zack?"

"Nose in the middle of the face. Mouth like a keyhole."

"Ah. What does Zack do?"

"James, don't you have a listing of the members?"

"Probably underneath the papers on my desk."

"Jimmy, there's a list—with your name newly pencilled in—pinned on the corkboard in the little lounge outside the kitchen."

"Where's the kitchen?"

"POOR old James!" Eliza Shakespere said to him. "It's hell to be new and not know how a place works." Eliza had dropped in shortly before five, and Leslie broke out a bottle of vodka. Someone got ice from the kitchen. Nobody felt like going home. Everyone hung out in Leslie's office.

Ilka said, "My project is to not nag Jimmy."

Everybody said, "That's right! You leave Jimmy alone!"

Ilka was surprised

"Take me out to the ballgame! I don't care if I never get back!"

when, on their drive home, her mouth opened and said, "I was wondering, Jimmy, I mean, typing, is that what precisely you were hired to do, do you think?"

James said, "Not typing. Entering. I've got to get my desk cleared."

"I was only wondering," said Ilka—and thought, *Wondering*, not nagging—"when are you going to get started on Leslie's conference."

"When I've got my list entered in the computer."

Ilka thought she must surely be going to stop; however, she said, "I was only wondering when you'll finish getting it entered."

"Me, too," Jimmy said. "That's just what I've been only wondering, too."

Ilka said nothing all the way up the narrow path to the front door. Poor Ilka! She came from a race of women who assumed that their men would drop things and fall over them, which the men generally went ahead and did. Ilka assumed that James was going to screw up, and she experienced the release into the hollow of her stomach of gall. In the kitchen she ran herself a glass of water and swallowed it down. Because of all Ilka did not say all the while they were undressing for bed, she felt, when their paths crossed in the bathroom doorway, that she deserved a holiday from so much refraining, and asked James, "When do you think you'll have enough essays for a book?"

"I'll let that simmer till I've got this conference under my belt."

From here on, all that Ilka kept refraining from saying to James freighted the air of the little borrowed house; it hung in the cube of air contoured by James's old Chevrolet, in which they rode to and from the institute together. James felt it when the air inside which Ilka moved coincided on the institute stairs or in the corridors with his own air. Poor Jimmy!

A TIME passed. Tuesday morning, and a memo from Alpha asked James to bring his list to the meeting at two.

James turned the computer on, called the Computer Center, and asked, "How do I read my list?"

"What list is that?" asked the Computer Center.

James said, "My list of potential participants. I'm the new director of projects."

"Call up your SPAD Retrieval Screen."

"What's that?"

"Symbolic Program for Academic Disciplines."

Jimmy called back and said, "My manual doesn't have 'Retrieval.' The index skips from 'Reset all places, 377' to 'RFTCONV.EXE, 491.' Please, are you a person with a name and a heart?"

"My name's Joel."

"My name is James, and I'm about to be a pain in your neck. Walk me through this retrieval maneuver, please."

"What are you looking for?"

"Let's say a crack international lawyer, one famous theologian, alternately an ethicist, maybe a star doctor . . ."

"What's your value for law?" asked Joel.

"Pretty high."

"What's your code?"

"You mean a number? On a scale from one to ten, say, eight. Shall I enter eight?"

"What values do you want to run against it?"

James asked Joel if he knew Turkish. Joel said that he had to go and meet his dad for lunch.

"You have a dad!" said Jimmy.

"You can say that again. Keep entering your values, punch Enter, enter the answer to the question on the Dialog Box, and punch Enter."

When the Dialog Box asked Jimmy "DWZ MSG 3714 A12?" he punched the Escape button. The screen replied, "FATAL ERROR." Jimmy punched Escape again, and again the screen replied, "FATAL ERROR," and flashed off and on. Here's where Jimmy punched the Control button. The machine answered, "FATAL ERROR," and began to softly and mechanically roar. Jimmy punched Shift, he punched Caps Lock, he punched Scroll Lock, Control, Escape, Alt, Prtsc, Sys Req. The screen responded:

FATAL ERROR
FATAL ERROR
FATAL ERROR
FATAL ERROR
FATAL ERROR
FATAL ERROR . . .

and flashed, and roared, and James let out a howl that brought Ilka, Celie (the receptionist), Wendy, Alpha, Leslie Shakespere, Zachariah, and Alvin running to his door.

"If I reschedule for four will it give

you enough time?" Leslie said to James.

Joel did not get back from his lunch till quarter after three. "Did you enter your password?" he asked James.

"I have a password?"

"You have to make up a password," said Joel.

"I wish I were dead," said James.

"Can't have more than eight characters. Enter 'I-W-I-S-H-I-W-E,' punch Enter. What does your screen say?"

"I,D, question mark?"

"Enter your ID. . . . You don't have one? You have to request an ID from the security administration in writing."

WENDY passed James standing outside the door of the conference room. James said, "I'm breathing and waiting for my heart to slow down."

"Your heart is slowing down?" worried Wendy.

"Actually, it's speeding up and about to strangle my breathing, so here goes!" James opened the door. Alpha, Joe, Leslie, Nat, Ilka, Yvette, Zack, and Alvin turned and looked at him.

James said, "I didn't know there *was* a security administration. It scares me to think what all else there might be that I don't know!" He looked affectionately at Leslie—a fine head! A beautiful man, and an honest one. Jimmy liked it that he was unable to seduce a smile out of Leslie. Leslie sat and looked at Jimmy with frank, and, it seemed to Jimmy, appropriate, irritation.

Leslie said, "Well, then, bring in the old directories."

James said, "I haven't got the old directories."

"Where are they?"

"I got Lila to clear my desk before she left to join her husband in Indo-China."

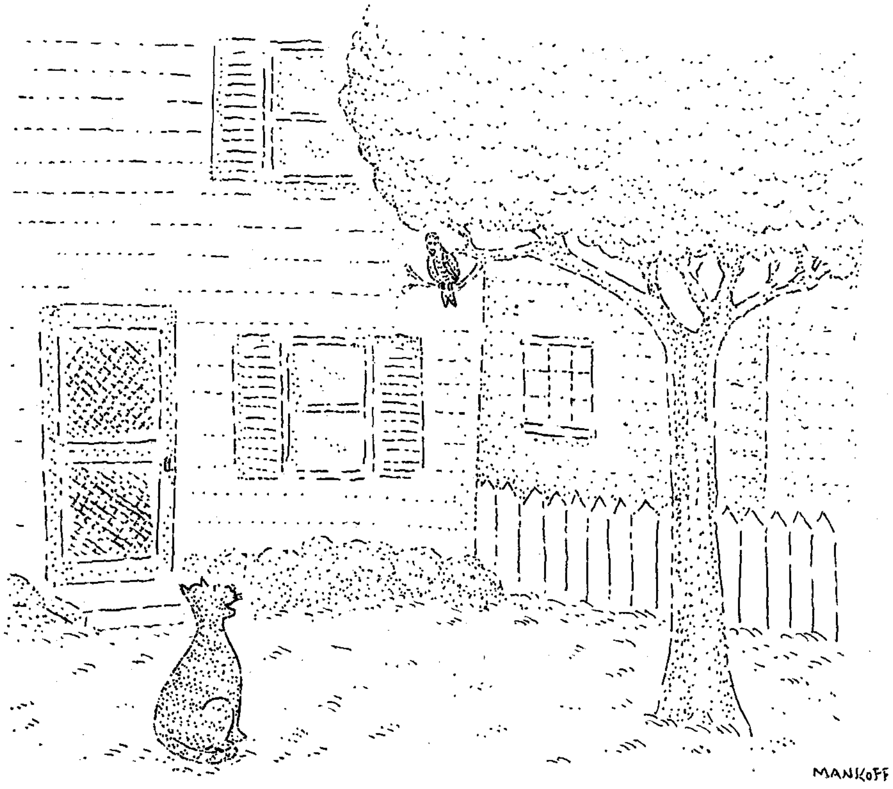
It turned out that the senior fellows had brought their own lists of prospects, and that James's job was to locate their present whereabouts and get off the letters of invitation.

"Go over to the university library and use their directories," said Leslie.

Alpha said, "This is getting pretty late. People have their schedules."

James said, "I'll run right over."

On shelves behind the information desk sat the fat serial directories bound in matte-red cloth through '59, thereafter in matte-navy that must have run out in '67, when it became fractionally grayer, or was that a different directory? James took out the last volume. It opened at page 1247. James read the first entry. He read the entry below the first entry and glanced over his shoulder to make sure the librarian wasn't watching. The librarian's chair was empty. The librarian was standing behind James's other shoulder, asking if she could help. She was a little woman, not young, with a tender indoor pallor. James smiled into her eyes. "Do you ever read something and it refuses to turn into meaning?" he asked her.



"Hey, let's do lunch."

The librarian was not a smiler and hadn't the flirtatious instinct. She asked James what he was looking for. Jimmy followed her across the room saying, "It's interesting that knowing how Washington works—who's who, who thinks what of whom, where everybody is—makes me understand what all I do not know about the scholarly world." The librarian kept walking; James kept talking. "Do you remember being a little kid and not knowing the map—names and boundaries—of what you knew must be out there to know, and you didn't know whom to ask what?"

The librarian said, "Second and third shelves," and walked back to her chair behind the information desk.

James took down "A-P," navy with black lettering, and swore he'd make *it to the* "D"s *without looking at the* clock.

JENNY BERNSTINE called Ilka and said, "I saw James at the library. Is he O.K.?"

"I don't think so," said Ilka. "It's like living underwater. He doesn't dare to take the time to come up for air."

WEEKS went by. Alpha put her head in Jimmy's door and said, "Dyer says he hasn't got our letter."

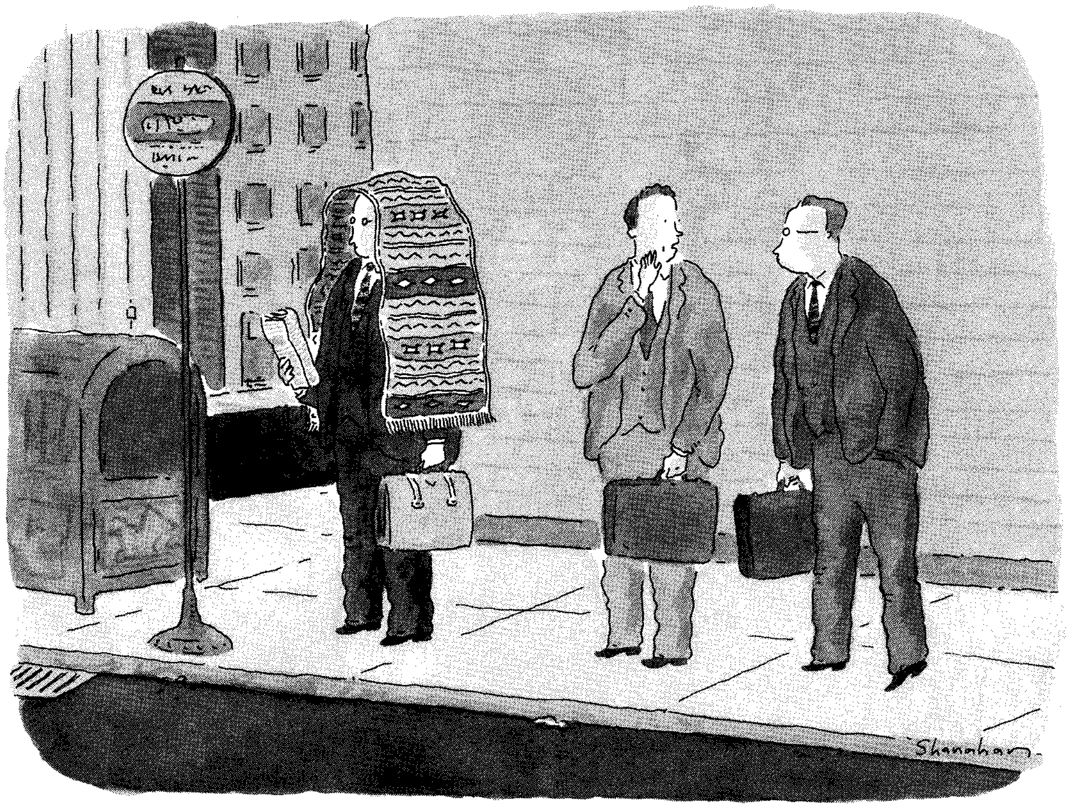
"It's in the bunch I sent off yesterday," lied James, and his scalp prickled.

"Oh, good!" Alpha said. "Do remember, James, to always put copies of all outgoing correspondence in the ring binder in the lounge, so every member can keep track of what everyone is doing."

"I'll run it right out." James waited for her to close the door behind her. Using both his hands for shovels, he churned the new agglomeration of papers on his desk.

Alpha phoned from her office to say, "I called Paul back to say the letter's in the mail, but he's leaving the end of this week. Better send a duplicate to him in Oxford."

"Will do," said James. James called Joel. "Come over and help



"I'm sure it's a rug."

me, please, now! Sorry!"

Jimmy assumed there were eyes behind the horn-rims; a mouth inside the beard; feet, sockless, inside the frayed tennis shoes.

"I need the address of a man, name of Dyer, and I don't know how to call my list up!"

Joel sat in Jimmy's chair, punched, gazed, and said, "You didn't Control KD it. The job abended."

"Abended?"

"DB zapped."

"So what's on the computer?"

"Zilch," said Joel, and went back to his Center.

"*What* are you *do*ing on the floor?" That was Ilka standing in the doorway.

"Making order," said Jimmy. Jimmy had pulled the bottom drawer all the way out, upturned it on the carpet, and was aligning every paper and every envelope according to its size and kind. "I can't find Dyer's address. Maybe it's D-*I*-E-R."

"How likely are you to find it in the drawer you keep blank institute stationery in?"

"So unlikely that when I fail to find it I won't jump out of the window."

"So ask Alpha!"

"*NO!*" shouted James. "I can*not* ask Alpha."

"Why, James, can't you ask Alpha for the man's address?"

Jimmy put his head into his hands and said, "Did you know that panic can be located? The prickling is on the in*side* of the scalp; the sort of grinding roiling is below the ribs in the place you'd expect to feel hunger. The simultaneous silent roaring is not, interestingly, in the ears."

"James, you want me to ask Alpha?"

"*NO!*" Jimmy howled, and he leaned his cheek on Ilka's breast and put his arms around her waist like a pugilist hanging his weight round his adversary's neck for a moment's breather. He said, "I earnestly wish that I were dead." Ilka, stroking his hair, aborted her answering thought.

James said, "Marry me, Ilka!"

Ilka said, "All right," and waited, and kept waiting for something friendly that she must surely be going to say to Jimmy.

"SO. I guess James and I are going to get married."

"We'll make you a reception," said Eliza. "Our gooseberries are ripe. Do you and James like gooseberries?" She reached for the cookbook on the shelf behind her.

If Eliza had asked Ilka, "And are you happy?" Ilka would have said, "Sure. I kind of love James," but Eliza said, "Gooseberry, gooseberry, gooseberry. Here: Gooseberry. Gooseberry jelly; Gooseberry pudding, baked; Pudding, boiled! Chhhh! Gooseberry sauce for boiled mackerel? Hmm. Gooseberry tart, trifle . . ."

Ilka said, "You don't know what it's like waking every morning wishing the person in your bed, whom you are really fond of, weren't really there."

"Not every morning," said Eliza.

"I don't believe you!" cried Ilka. "How could you wish Leslie weren't there! Eliza, James is not going to hack it, and he knows it, and he's frightened. Leslie does everything he does right!"

"That's right," said Eliza. "You don't wake up every morning next to somebody who does everything right. You think Leslie and I don't look across the bed and wish each other dead?"

"That's right. I think you don't."

"Here. Gooseberry fool!" said Eliza. "Green gooseberries: to every pint of pulp add one pint of milk or half a pint of cream and half a pint of milk; sugar to taste. Leslie loves gooseberry fool."

THE fool was a delicious fool, and Leslie made a ceremony of the superb champagne. Ilka sat, completely happy, where of all places she most loved to sit—on the Shakesperes' porch with the Bernstines, the Stones, the Cones, Zachariah and Sophy, Alvin and Mary, and Yvette Gordot.

Why was Ilka surprised that her friends were getting to love James?

ALPHA called Jimmy's office and said, "This is a jinx. Paul thinks it is the English postal service."

"I'll get out a duplicate of the duplicate."

AND more time passed. James sat in Eliza Shakespere's kitchen. She filled his glass with good white table wine, and he said "Thanks!" Eliza filled her own glass. Jimmy watched Eliza move from the sink to the icebox to the stove. He said, "I watch Ilka make a lap, and her head bends forward, her arms bend forward at shoulder level, and again at the elbows, again at the wrists. It's a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree embrace, an egg shape, one single seamless cold shoulder turned to everything on the outside, including me! Thanks." Eliza had refilled his glass. "Shouldn't the father of the fetus be an insider? Ilka has forgotten all about me. Ilka doesn't even nag me anymore! What is this?"

Eliza had set a plate in front of James and watched him taste. "This is unbelievable. Aren't you going to eat?"

"Maybe not just yet." Eliza helped him to salad and refilled his glass and her own, and lit herself a cigarette, and sat down across the table.

James said, "You know what ambrosia is? It's what tastes like the smell promises. Imagine coffee tasting like the smell of fresh-ground beans. Or pepper, or banana. Eliza, this is that sort of a taste! What is it?" Eliza refilled their glasses. James said, "You know what writing a book feels like? Like getting up from a very large, very rich, very greasy meal and having to make yourself sit down and eat a very large, very rich, very greasy meal: it is what, of all the things in all the world, you most want not to do. Does Leslie tell you my fuckups? You're the last person I should tell," and James told Eliza about aligning the blank institute paper: "If I could create Platonic order, mustn't everything, by definition, be where it ought to be, and wouldn't I find the letter I ought to have written to an Englishman called Dyer, Dier, Diner, Drier, or Driner?"

Eliza said, "Let's creep upstairs and poke in Leslie's desk!"

"Here! Paul B. Thayer," said Eliza. "Old Oxford buddy of Leslie's. Theologian at Brasenose!"

James sobbed and put his arms around Eliza and kissed her, and she kissed him. All the way down the stairs she kept picking his hands like so many burrs off her nape, her hip, her breast but let him keep his head on her shoulder and finish sobbing before she got him inched out the door.

"WE'LL buy a house," said Ilka. James said, "Wait till my retention meeting. What if I get fired?"

ON THE BACK OF THE BOARDING PASS

In the airport by myself I forget
where I am that is the way they are made
over and over at such cost the ripped
halls lengthening through stretches of echoes I
have forgotten what day it is in this light
what time it could be this was the same morning
in which I mislaid the two timepieces
they may turn up again timepieces can be
bought but not the morning the waking
into the wish to stay and the vanishing
constants I keep returning to this was the
morning of mending the fence where the black dog
followed the water in after the last
cloudburst and I kept on trying to tie
a thread around the valley where we live
I was making knots to hold it there in its
place without changing as though this were the waking
this seeming this passage this going through

—W. S. MERWIN

• •

Did Ilka not hear, or did she forget about James? Ilka went out, looked for, and found a house. They moved early in March. Maggie was born the first of May.

"Now we're both living underwater," Ilka told Eliza. "It's a luxurious, slow sort of motion."

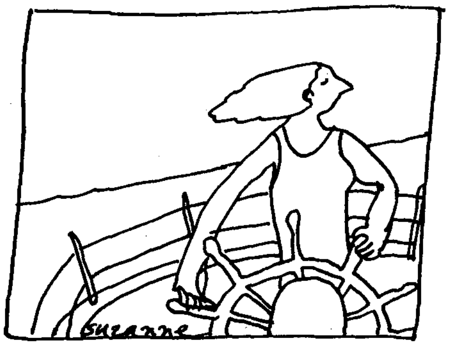
"I remember, I remember," Eliza said.

"You say to yourself, 'What did I walk in here for? Ah, yes, the baby is screaming.' 2 A.M. The light's still on downstairs in poor Jimmy's study."

THE *institute needed* James to drive to Washington. Leslie called Ilka and said, "Might it be a good idea to have him out of town while we meet about his retention?" Ilka thought that it was a very good idea.

LESLIE said, "I've accepted Ilka's request to disqualify herself. I see Zack's hand. I see Alvin's hand, I see Yvette, in that order."

Zack said, "Is it the sense of this committee that James is actually organizing conferences?"



Alvin said, "Well, he's had to find his way around the institute."

"And lost our directories," Yvette said.

"Is it the sense of this committee that James is writing a book?"

"It's simmering," Yvette said.

"Well, he's had the conferences to develop," Alvin said.

"And he's had a baby," Joe said.

"It's not a baby, it's a book he contracted to have."

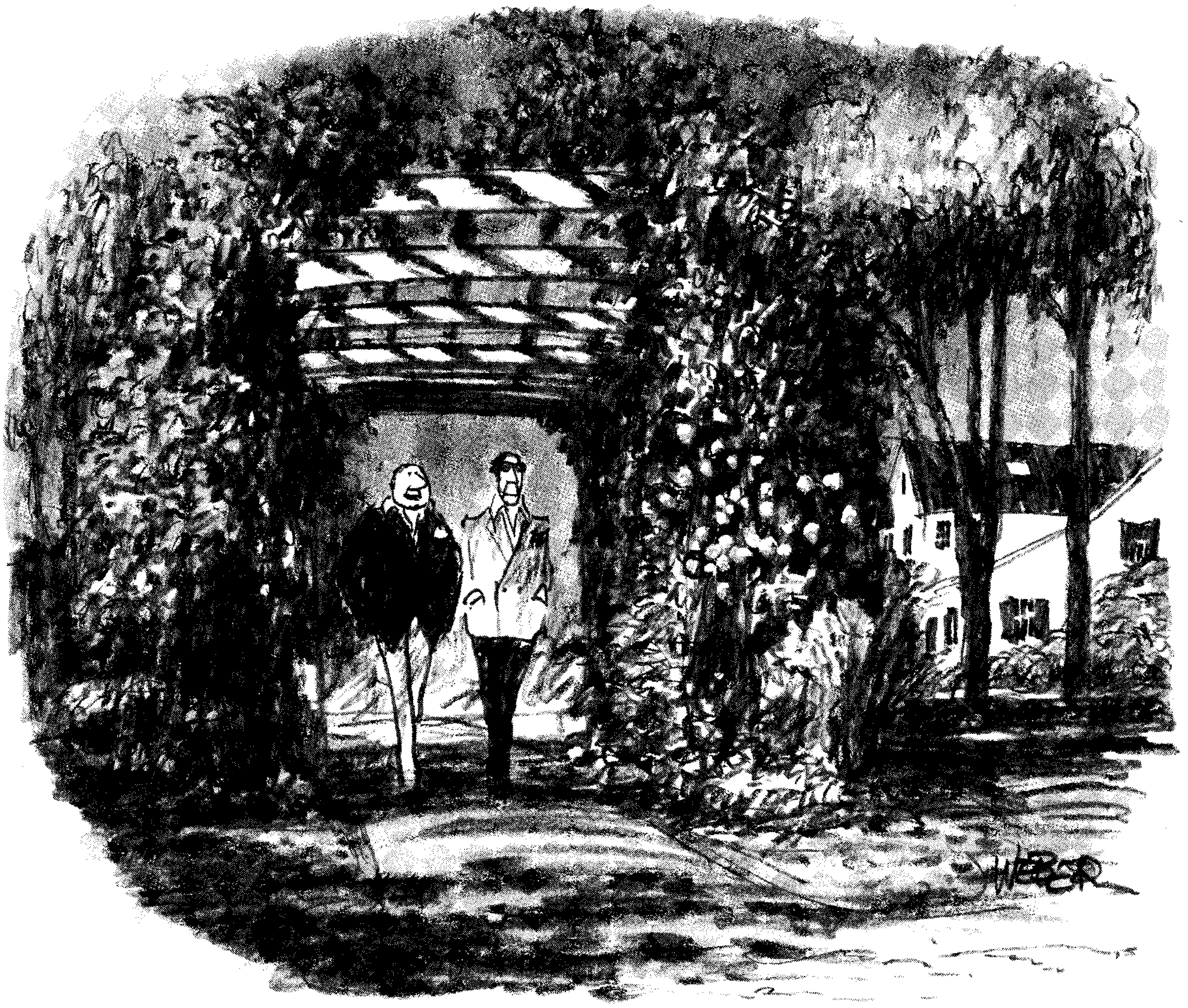
"Well, because we ask our young people *to commit themselves to what* we know is impossible to accomplish."

"To which they contractually commit themselves."

"And which every one of us around this table has at one time or another accomplished."

"And never in the time specified. How can we fire James when we've wasted all this time out of his life. . . ." Alvin stopped. Everyone's ears pricked up at a tiny but distinct sound like a vase breaking in a distant room.

Zack said, "We're amazing! We say, 'Let's give this incompetent time to prove himself.' The incompetent proves he is incompetent, and we say, 'We've wasted his time!' While James's chums congratulate themselves on the milk of their human kindness, they might ask themselves if it wouldn't be more humane to relieve the poor young man of a situation he cannot . . ." and



"I was middle class once. Some of it was fun."

• •

Zack also stopped. The members of the committee who sat with their backs to the window saw the white wall blush, saw the members across the table raise their eyes to the window, and looked around and saw the sky flare suddenly with a wartime redness that went as suddenly out.

"Interesting," said Joe, "that we leave out of the equation how very well James writes. Don't we know that writing takes as long as it takes? Is there anyone around this table who didn't know that the time James projected for the completion of his book bore no relation to the time it might be going to take him but was predicated on the time we required him to say he was going to take, in order to give him the job?"

"And he agreed contractually."

Here's where Nat Cone turned purple, got up, shouted, and sat down. Leslie said, "I see Alpha, then Yvette . . ."

It wasn't until Leslie passed the blank papers up both sides of the table that there was a knock on the door. Leslie frowned at Betty. "We're in committee, I told you. . . ." Betty kept standing in the door. Leslie said, "Would you all excuse me?" and went outside.

WHEN the bell rang, Ilka set the baby in the crib and went down the stairs. Outside the door stood the two policemen. Ilka thought, The baby!, remembered that she had just set the baby down in the crib in the room at the top of the stairs, and said, "My mother!" and briefly marvelled that the Concordance police should have jurisdiction over a calamity that would have to have happened in New York. One policeman was too small, looked Puerto Rican, and pronounced Ilka's name as if it were Spanish. The other policeman was big enough—too big and too young—a big boy policeman, who looked underdone, as if he had raw sex on his mind. The small policeman's upper lip looked naked, as if it had once had, or should have, a mustache. Ilka said, "Is it my husband?" The Puerto Rican policeman asked if they could come inside. It took him a time to step far enough into the hall for the boy policeman to be able to get far enough in to get the door closed behind them. The two policemen filled the narrow hallway. They looked gently at Ilka, and that frightened her. She said, "It's my husband!" They did not deny it. Ilka thought the Puerto Rican policeman said that the car had made an explosion, and she said, "What?"

"Coming up the hill behind the

institute," said the Puerto Rican policeman. If Ilka had understood what was intended by the edge of the seat of the chair that kept so irritatingly nudging the back of her knees she would have been glad to sit. "Lady," the small policeman kept saying. "Miss! Lady! You make yourself sick, lady." Ilka sympathized with the two policemen's not wishing to be in the same room with all this noise, and would have willingly undertaken to stop the screaming if she had been at leisure, but Ilka's mind preoccupied itself with the notion of an error: disasters in a Spanish accent might not be our disasters. Ilka stopped screaming and asked for the number.

"Lady? The number?"

"The number," said Ilka. "The number. Of the police station." Ilka imagined a room with large, middle-aged, white policemen walking to and fro between the desks.

The small, Puerto Rican policeman wrote the number on the back of the paper that had Ilka's name and address on it, and Ilka dialled and gave her name and address and said, "Could you please . . ." and stopped. The next words out of her mouth would have been "send a real policeman," so then Ilka said, "Sorry. Thanks," hung up, and said, "I'm sorry!" to the small Puerto Rican policeman. Now Ilka remembered the baby in her crib at the top of the stairs. The baby must have heard her screaming. Ilka said, "Excuse me," to the two policemen and ran up the stairs.

The baby, Maggie, had lately learned how to sit, but not how, when she sat, to lie down. She sat where Ilka had put her. Her enormous eyes stared like two round, black voids between the slats of the crib. Ilka took the little girl up and wrapped her in her arms, and that was when Ilka swallowed. What Ilka swallowed was the fact that James was dead, and she said, "Poor Daddy's car is broken. Come and say hello to the policemen," in the normal voice that would henceforward emanate so curiously out of her throat and mouth. Ilka met the boy policeman galumphing up the stairs.

"Miss? Where you want us to put it?"

"Put it?" said Ilka.

"Put him."

"Oh. Put him . . . I guess on the bed in the big bedroom?"

Ilka hid in the kitchen with the baby, chattering about juice and the whereabouts of the pretty blue bottle and whatever the matter could be with the silly nipple that wouldn't and wouldn't go on the silly bottle, but the baby had turned her head way around and kept her gaze fixed in the direction of the door on the other side of which the two male voices were trying to figure a method by which the stretcher might be maneuvered through the front door and up the narrow stair.

Ilka went to the kitchen door to say, "Better just put it in the study downstairs," but the stretcher was stuck on the bannisters. The Puerto Rican policeman, who was backing up the steps, had to be at the head end. He said, "Move, lady, please," and to the boy policeman at what had to be James's feet he said, "*Left!* You go left and lift. Move back. I tell you, back, and lift. Higher."

Ilka returned to the kitchen and fed the baby, and presently she heard the men's footsteps coming down the stairs. When Ilka went to carry the baby up, the two policemen stood by the hall mirror and turned their startled, apologetic faces as if Ilka had caught them out. Ilka understood that they were not going to go away. "You can sit in the living room," she said to them, but when she came down they were huddling in the kitchen. "It's all right," she told them, but they scuttled out into the hall and stood by the bannister trying to look inconspicuous. Ilka asked them if they would like a cup of coffee, but they shook their heads vigorously, in unison.

Later Ilka happened upon the big boy policeman peeing in the bathroom. He said, "Oops." And she said, "Sorry."

When the doorbell began to ring, the young policeman detailed himself to let people in. Joe and Jenny Bernstine came first with their horrified faces. The young policeman opened the door to the Shakesperes. Ilka saw Eliza crying and went toward her and moved into the other woman's arms, grateful for the flow, at last, of her own tears.

Leslie asked Ilka if she would like him to make arrangements.

Ilka said, "Arrangements. Oh, yes, please! He's upstairs in the big bedroom."

"Who's upstairs?"

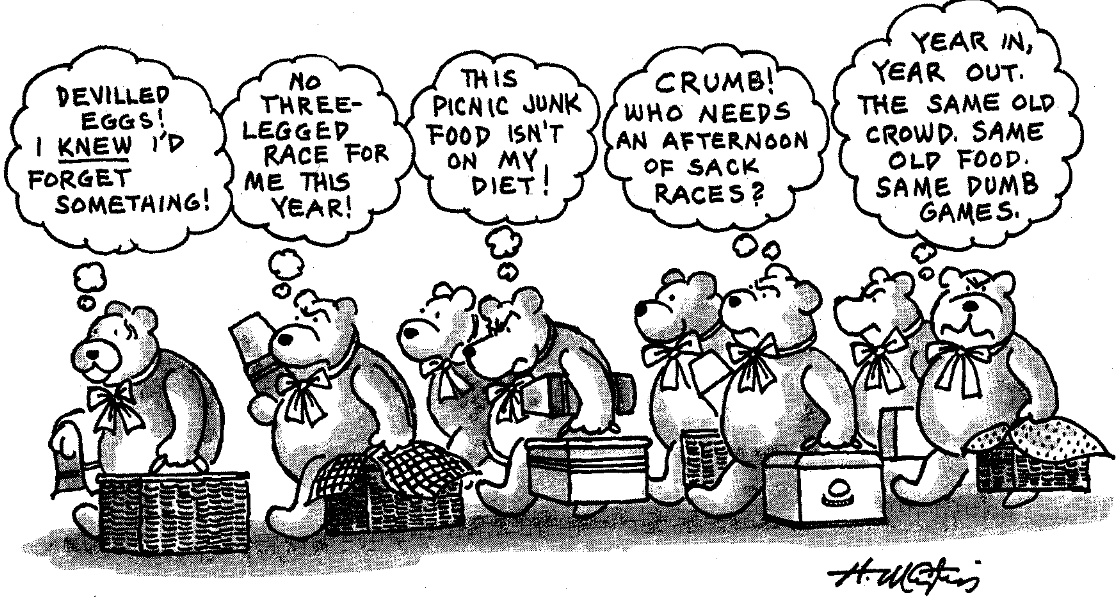
"James," said Ilka. "In the big bedroom."

"In this house? They brought him to the house! Christ!" said Leslie, and his mouth made a thin, ferocious line that was not at all attractive. "Ilka, go answer the door. Let me deal with this."

The Stones had arrived, and Alvin, Sophy, and Zack. Yvette Gordot came.

Ilka saw Leslie talking to the small policeman, who *did* look a little worried. Leslie sat a long while at the phone

EN ROUTE TO THE TEDDY BEARS' PICNIC


DEVILLED EGGS! I KNEW I'D FORGET SOMETHING!
NO THREE-LEGGED RACE FOR ME THIS YEAR!
THIS PICNIC JUNK FOOD ISN'T ON MY DIET!
CRUMB! WHO NEEDS AN AFTERNOON OF SACK RACES?
YEAR IN, YEAR OUT. THE SAME OLD CROWD. SAME OLD FOOD. SAME DUMB GAMES.
H. Martin

on the console in the hall. She said, "Leslie. Thank you." Leslie rapidly dipped and shook his head, rose, took Ilka's hand and kissed it.

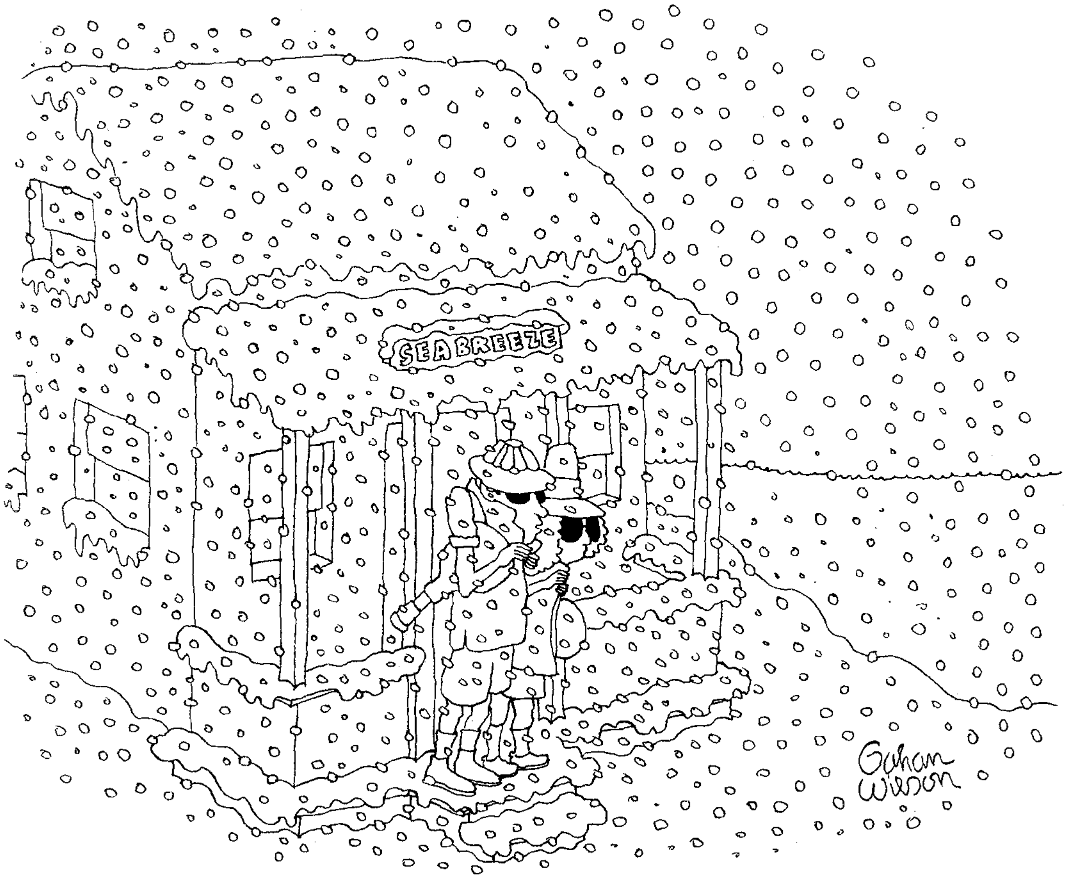
Ilka understood that Leslie had left. Nancy Cone stood in the window crying bitterly. Ilka was very grateful to her. There was suddenly food on trays and in baskets. "Someone left a nice casserole on the front porch," Sophy said.

"Oh. Thanks," said Ilka. "Where's the baby?"

"Jenny's got her out in the yard."

Ilka kept saying, "Thanks," to people. "Does anybody want some coffee?" she asked them.

Everybody said, "No, thanks." Leslie said, "I would very much like some coffee." When had Leslie returned?



"When you think back, it was a weird winter, too."

Ilka was in the kitchen filling a kettle with water when the Puerto Rican policeman came and stood in the kitchen door. He asked Ilka if she minded if he studied his book for this exam a week from Tuesday, to make sergeant. Ilka took him into Jimmy's study and cleared the papers off Jimmy's desk onto a chair.

Ilka walked upstairs and went into the bedroom. That was Jimmy under the white sheet. Ilka didn't recognize this sheet. It was not one of her sheets. Ilka went to turn the sheet back, but there stood the young policeman in the door, very large and embarrassed, and asked her if she would mind if he came in to watch the playoffs, his favorite team. A friend of his brother's was a rookie fullback. Ilka minded very much, but couldn't remember if that was right or not. She couldn't figure if Jimmy's being dead under that sheet ought to prevent a bored boy from watching his brother's friend on his favorite team. She said, "Get yourself a chair out of the baby's room at the top of the stairs." But the policeman said, "That's O.K." Ilka understood; he wanted to be a minimum of bother. She understood that her presence prevented him from turning the TV on and that the game had already started, so she went out. The TV stood on the dresser. It troubled Ilka that the boy would have to sit on the edge of the bed to watch it. Would he budge Jimmy's legs under the foreign sheet to make himself room? As long as Ilka lived she tried to imagine a way for the young policeman to have sat on the edge of the bed without having moved Jimmy's legs.

THE Cones were leaving; Zachariah was going with them, but would be back in the morning. Ilka was earnestly engaged in begging Jenny Bernstine to believe that she, Ilka, wanted to spend the night right here, wanted the baby to stay here with her, did not need—did not want—anyone staying over, when the doorbell rang: outside stood two men from the coroner's office with a folded stretcher. Leslie walked outside and closed the door and talked with them and came back in and said, "Ilka, take the baby into the living room."

"No!" shouted Ilka. "I want to stand right here." Ilka stood at the bottom of the stairs and shivered. Someone put a shawl around her. "Thanks!" Ilka said. The phone rang. Someone handed Ilka the receiver. Ilka's friend Carter was calling from the Coast. "Just thinking about you," he said, "wondering what you're doing."

Ilka said, "Jimmy is dead."

"We have a bad connection," said Carter on the other side of the continent. "I don't understand what you are saying."

"Yes, you do," Ilka said. "Jimmy is dead. They're bringing him down the stairs."

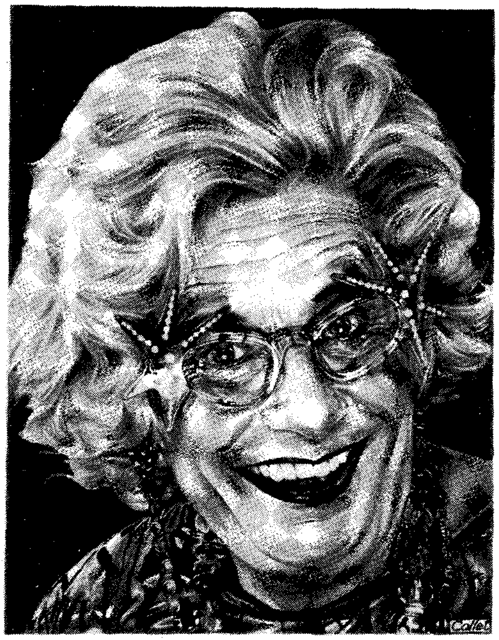
"Christ!" Carter said. "This is embarrassing."

"No, it's not! It is *not* embarrassing! Why does being dead need to be embarrassing?" howled Ilka as the two men lifted Jimmy over the bannister, got him angled out the door, carried him down the path and out the gate, and put him in the back of the coroner's truck.

—LORE SEGAL

PROFILES

PLAYING POSSUM



March 8, 1989. It's 3 P.M., but the marquee above the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, the oldest and most venerable of London's theatres, has already been switched on. Passersby as far away as Covent Garden can pick out the sign's blinking red neon message: "Dame Edna's Second Coming—She's Back Because She Cares."

In England's rich and vicious eighties, "caring" was high concept that became high parody. Margaret Thatcher, caricatured on the cover of *The Spectator* as a Dame Edna lookalike, complete with pink diamanté glasses, assured the nation that the Tories cared. "Labour Cares" was the theme of the Opposition. And Dame Edna, always up to the minute, was repeating her 1987 revue, and raking in approximately a hundred and sixty thousand pounds a week from selling out the Drury Lane's twenty-two hundred and forty-five seats, because she, too, cared. "I mean that in a very caring, nurturing way," Dame Edna was fond of saying after delivering a particularly low blow. The maneuver was in keeping with the vindictive style of the times, and so was the title of Dame Edna's 1987 show, "Back with a Vengeance!" By the late eighties, revenge on liberalism was such a blatant part of the English political climate that maliciousness—Dame Edna's stock-in-trade—could be uninhibitedly flaunted. And Dame Edna was nothing if not uninhibited and illiberal.

Dame Edna had announced herself to the critics and the newspapers weeks before the opening of the 1989 show—"Back with a Vengeance! The Second Coming"—and had done it in her own inimitable style: "My gynaecologist, my numerologist, my biorhythmologist, my T'ai-Chi instructor, my primal scream therapist, and my aromatherapist all tell me that I will be at the height of my powers as a woman from March 9, 1989, for a strictly limited season." The press release, featuring a Russian Constructivist logo and a clenched fist full of gladioli, added, "It's not so much a show, more a private audience. And since I'm writing my autobiography this could just be one of the last chances you have of seeing me before my millennium comeback. DO YOURSELVES A FAVOUR—See the Turn of the Century *before* the turn of the century." This was not a conventional press release, but then Dame Edna is not a conventional person. Dame Edna is, in fact, a theatrical phenomenon: the only solo act to play (and fill) the Drury Lane since it opened for business, in 1663, with Beaumont and Fletcher's "The Humorous Lieutenant." The *Observer* named Dame Edna "one of the idols of the 80s," and the public keeps faith with her. The 1987 "Back with a Vengeance!," which ran nine months and played to capacity, had the third-highest advance in the history of London's West End—exceeded only by "Phantom of the Opera" and "Chess." For the thirty-one shows in Dame Edna's 1989 season, the box office had six hundred thousand pounds in advance sales the day before opening. Television had won Dame Edna an even wider popularity and a new theatregoing audience. In the autumn of 1987, a seventh of the British Isles, or about eight million three hundred thousand people, representing 48.7 per cent of the network share, tuned in to "The Dame Edna Experience" in prime time—at ten-thirty on a Saturday night—to watch Dame Edna, the supremo of narcissists, treat the celebrity guests on her TV talk show like audiovisual aids.

But Dame Edna's influence on the imagination of British culture i best registered by how she has been incorporated into some of the most cherished English institutions. Dame Edna has opened the Harrods Sale, turned on Regent Street's Christmas lights, played a cameo role in the long-running radio soap opera "The Archers," and twice been a radio guest on that surest barometer of British success "Desert Island Discs." Dame Edna has sung in the Royal Albert Hall, when two thousand people in two nights heard her cantata "The Song of Australia." A street has been named after her in Moonee Ponds, the suburb of Melbourne from which she hails. She is one of four Australians whose waxwork effigies are on display at Madame Tussaud's. And the College of Heraldry has drawn up Dame Edna's coat of arms, which bears the motto "I Share and I Care," with the heraldic symbols of crossed gladioli, a funnel-web spider, a blowfly, and the Sydney Opera House. "Dame Edna has been notionally advanced to GBE, so that she qualifies for armorial supporters," the *Times* of London reported in 1982. "They are a shark and a possum, both wearing butterfly glasses."

Dame Edna has also blitzed the commercial world. Between 1981, in a previous season at the Drury Lane, and 1989, Dame Edna's billing, while always monumental, underwent a subtle shift, from "housewife/superstar" to "megastar." She is now, like the celebrities of whom she is a parody, a multinational corporation of one, who franchises every last particle of her persona that the public will buy. And it will buy a lot. Dame Edna is a spokesperson for an airline and an electrical-appliance company. Her piercing singing voice, which sounds like an outback Jerry Colonna, is on tape cassettes doing both disco versions of rock-and-roll standards and her own golden oldies, like "Niceness," "The

Night We Burnt My Mother's Things," and "Every Mother Wants a Boy Like Elton." There are mugs ("A Dame Edna Everage Beverage"), badges ("I'm Into Edna"), and even imitation Dame Edna eyeglasses. These yellow plastic replicas of Dame Edna's "face furniture," complete with a star cluster sweeping up and over the rims, cram the joke-shop window across the street from the Drury Lane, while a behemoth green neon version of them flickers on the billboard above the theatre entrance.

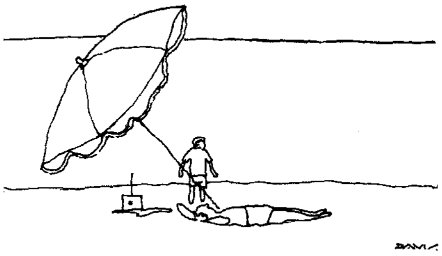
Dame Edna's name is synonymous with surprise, and even with shock. As her former sobriquet "housewife/superstar" implied, Dame Edna is a celebration of contradictions: hilarious and malign, polite and lewd, generous and envious, high and low comic. But the most sensational of all Dame Edna's contradictions is that she is a he.

Dame Edna is the creation of Barry Humphries. Or, as the letterhead of his yellow stationery has it, "Barry Humphries is a division of the Barry Humphries Group." This is true. Dame Edna has taken on a visibility and a reality for the public which vie with, even subsume, Humphries' own public persona. A star is the impresario of himself, but Humphries is the impresario of his selves. The small print at the bottom of his stationery says, "The recipient is advised to preserve this memorandum as it could well become a very extremely valuable collector's item." This, too, is true. The fifty-seven-year-old Humphries is a prodigious comic talent. His co-presence in Dame Edna—a character so real to the English public that her autobiography, "My Gorgeous Life," is being sold by his publisher, Macmillan, on its nonfiction list—incarnates the essence of the grotesque: the sense that things that should be kept apart are fused together. This style—what Baudelaire called "the absolute comic"—also creates in an audience a paroxysm, a swoon, "something profound, primitive, axiomatic, which is much closer to innocent life and absolute joy."

I know the feeling. At Dame Edna's 1981 show, "An Evening's Intercourse with Barry Humphries," I was blindsided by one of her startling observations and fell off my seat laughing. I can't account for the next two minutes of the show. I was on the floor.

Afterward, I determined to write about Humphries from the wings. I still have notes from our first backstage meeting, when I sat with him between acts and we talked as I watched an urbane Australian man of letters transform himself into Dame Edna, whom he has been sporadically impersonating since late 1955. "There's something of the clown, something rather ritualized about the character," Humphries said, applying his carmine "lippie." "It's a clown in the form of an Australian housewife. It belongs a bit to the pantomime-dame tradition, though it doesn't exploit the pantomime dame, which is generally a rather sturdy man. The joke of the pantomime dame is the tension between the female of the clothes and the stocky footballer's legs and boots. The drag queen is the other extreme, really a man on the one hand mocking a woman and at the same time trying to titillate the audience. Edna is somewhere in between—closer, really, to character acting: a man playing a woman and making points about life."

In the years since that first interview, Humphries has become more famous (the marquee announces "The Almost Legendary Barry Humphries"), and Dame Edna's frivolity more majestic. But as I walk through the safety doors onto the vast Drury Lane stage, where the technical run-through is noisily in progress, neither the actor nor his creation is to be found. Backstage feels drab and mundane, but the props, scattered about the stage like so many jigsaw pieces on a gargantuan table, promise something bright and extraordinary. An Australian flag stretching the width of the proscenium is being battened down to be flown up in the labyrinth of catwalks and ropes. A cherry picker—a crane with a basket, which will lift Edna fifty feet above the stalls to sing her finale straight into the eyes of her balcony fans, whom she refers to as "the paupers"—is shunted off into the shadows. The basket itself, which usually hoists more earnest citizens, like firemen or telephone repairmen, has been turned into a kind of surrealist sculpture: its sides are now a dress of white organza, and its base is disguised with red, white, and blue crinoline and a pair of Edna's red size-9 high heels. Edna's magic wand, an electrified plastic gladiolus into which a microphone has been rigged, rests on the side of the basket.



The lightboard has been set up in the center of Row J. Behind it, slumped in conversation on the greenish-gold seats, are two men: Humphries' producer-manager, a no-nonsense Australian named Dennis Smith, who joined forces with Humphries in 1979, when he was about to launch "An Evening's Intercourse"; and Ian Davidson, a comedy writer, whom I recognize from my 1981 visit to the Drury Lane. Davidson's name has come up in the credits of almost all Humphries' comic activities since the late sixties, when he directed some of Edna's sketches for "The Late Show," the BBC's unsuccessful attempt to catch the receding wave of satire before it washed out. A modest, quiet man who began as an actor, and, in the mid-sixties, performed with Alan Arkin and Barbara Harris in America at the improvisational Second City, Davidson is one of three men billed as providing "acceptable additional jokes."

"Periodically, Barry says, 'These topical lines are getting a bit tired, better have a think about them,' " Davidson explains, pulling away his *Evening Standard* to reveal a pad on which he has jotted a few droll notions for his friend. "Then we have a phone call about them. But Barry rings other people as well. It's not a sort of solo position I have, although quite often I do get things in." He was whispering comic ideas to Humphries back when I interviewed him in the middle of his 1981 Drury Lane season. "I like to hear what the public are saying at the interval," Davidson told me then, while Edna was slipping into the tennis outfit she was wearing that year. "I stumbled upon a quarrel between a couple. She was accusing the man of sighing. He'd obviously bought the tickets. She was drunk and took exception to the show. 'You're sighing.' 'I never sigh.' 'Don't be so combatative.' She put in an extra

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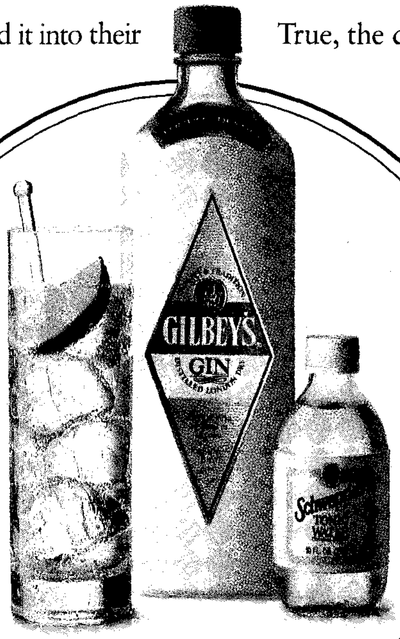

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syllable. I told Barry. He thought it was funny, and that night Edna said, speaking of her own husband, 'Oh, Norm. I used to take Norm to the theatre, but he didn't enjoy it. And when I said, "You've been sighing," he'd say, "Don't be so combatative." ' Barry's got this sort of total recall. He just threw it in during a little lull. I went back after the show, and Barry said, 'Two people have had an unforgettable night.' "

A BBC television crew appears in the Royal Box, to the left of the stage, and begins setting up its equipment. Smith checks his watch. "She's late."

"She's probably on the phone," Davidson says, jotting something down on his notepad.

"Got anything?"

"Something for Les," Davidson says, meaning another Humphries character in the show—Sir Les Patterson, the well-hung Australian cultural attaché and author of "The Traveller's Tool," who is the star of "Les Patterson Saves the World" (1987), Humphries' latest venture into feature films. Sir Les, with his "enormous encumbancy," has his own special way of opening Dame Edna's revue, and Davidson has come up with an idea in keeping with the full moral authority of the character. " 'Catch-69,' " he says. " 'If you do this thing, you're wrong. If you do that thing, you're wrong. It's a Catch-69 situation.' That's a Les possible. If you get a funny idea, it could be used for Les or for Edna. Or it could end up as a notice in the foyer."

The show's P.R. agent, Lynne Kirwin, looks out into the auditorium from the corner of the stage. "Edna's just coming," she says, as if the falsetto voice somewhere up and to the left of the lights being tested in the Royal Box could leave any doubt.

Davidson says, "We always talk about Edna as though she existed. 'Edna could say this,' not 'You could say this.' As a character, she is separate from him."

Dame Edna stands against the balustrade of the Royal Box while the TV crew presses microphones and recording machines up under her double chin. In high heels and hairdo, Edna is surprisingly large: around six feet four, with wide shoulders and very well-shaped and well-shaven legs—a kind of amazon of outrageousness. Her dress, a gaudy sunburst of colors, is matched by lensless glasses scalloped today with what look like variegated coffee beans. She stares out at the theatre dress circle, in front of which are the names of literary and theatrical giants, emblazoned in gold leaf: "BYRON," "DRYDEN," "GARRICK," "SHERIDAN," "KEAN." "Dennis!" Dame Edna cries, in the high-pitched voice that is her calling card. "Wouldn't it be nice if Edna's name was added to those in front of the dress circle?"

Dennis smiles and makes a note.

Dame Edna turns back to the task at hand, which is to talk to the TV presenter Cathy McGowan—herself a media star in the sixties, when she headed a popular music show, "Ready, Steady, Go." The interview starts, and Dame Edna, a master of media manipulation, goes to work. The character is in the voice, and its command never wavers. The mouth may twitch in mock anxiety at a probing question, the timbre may lower in a send-up of intimacy, but the swagger in Edna's falsetto is resolutely consistent.

"I feel I know you, Cathy. . . . I do. That fresh little face has looked at me in black-and-white and color. And your natural coloring is gorgeous. . . . It is! And what a survivor you are, aren't you? As fresh and lovely as you were in those old Swinging Sixties days. You were a famous television star then and I was just an ordinary Melbourne housewife. And look at me now . . . ha, ha! The young adore me. I can't analyze it. I don't analyze these things. But I struck a note with young people. There are a lot of Ednaboppers and WannabeEdnas. Kiddies copy me slavishly, Cathy . . . as they did you in the old days. Remember the whole of London was filled with little Cathy look-alikes, wasn't it? Remember?"

"No," Cathy says, a little nonplussed to find the ball suddenly back in her court. "Can I ask you about the outfits you wear? Your clothes? I don't really recognize the designer, Dame Edna."

"No," Dame Edna says, her voice slipping into its confidential mode. "I don't think designers should be too recognizable. That means an extreme of style, and you can only wear it about once and it goes out of fashion. I like to wear something a bit like Her Majesty the Queen—a close personal friend." She turns to the camera—"Hello!"—then back to Cathy: "She's watching. She just rang me to tell me that. . . . Actually, she faxed me. I've got a little fax in my purse. I'm one of the very few people with an in-purse fax."

"What did she say in the fax?"

"I'm not allowed to say. Our friendship would be at an end. But it was intimate. I can tell you that."

"Dame Edna, thank you so much for inviting me to the Royal Box."

"That's all right. This is the Royal Box. Where members of the Royal Family and very selected friends of mine come and watch my beautiful shows. And there's a lovely anteroom off it where they can have 'sambis.' Beautiful sandwiches. 'Sambis' is an Australian word for sandwiches. An old Aboriginal word. (It's not a very difficult language.)"

The lighting man is laughing so hard at Edna's flight of fancy that a lamp drops out of his hand. The crew sets up again. Dame Edna continues in full confidential flow: "There's a gorgeous mahogany little toilet there, too. Would you like to see that afterwards? Yes, many, many people have made themselves comfortable there."

Even after the camera is lifted off its tripod and the lights are packed away, Dame Edna is still holding forth in the Royal Box. In character, Humphries radiates what Charlie Chaplin, mourning its absence in his own music-hall performances, called "that come-hither thing." Dame Edna enjoys the exhilaration of the liberty she takes. Her pleasure is infectious. She's regaling the assembled about her special Australian ointment for stretch marks. "Ever seen a kangaroo with stretch marks? It contains an extract of a kangaroo's spleen. . . . It does. You don't use too much of it. Princess Diana actually uses it. She said she was starting to develop a pouch. So follow the instructions."

Dame Edna seems amazingly actual. Whether watching her on TV or face to face, a person soon loses the sense that this is a man-as-woman, and accepts her as real. (So real, in fact, that Edna is impersonated at drag parties.) This sense of actuality is due in part to the rich coherence of her story, which Humphries has built up in public over the years, and in part to his own performance, which is so relaxed and vivid within the param-

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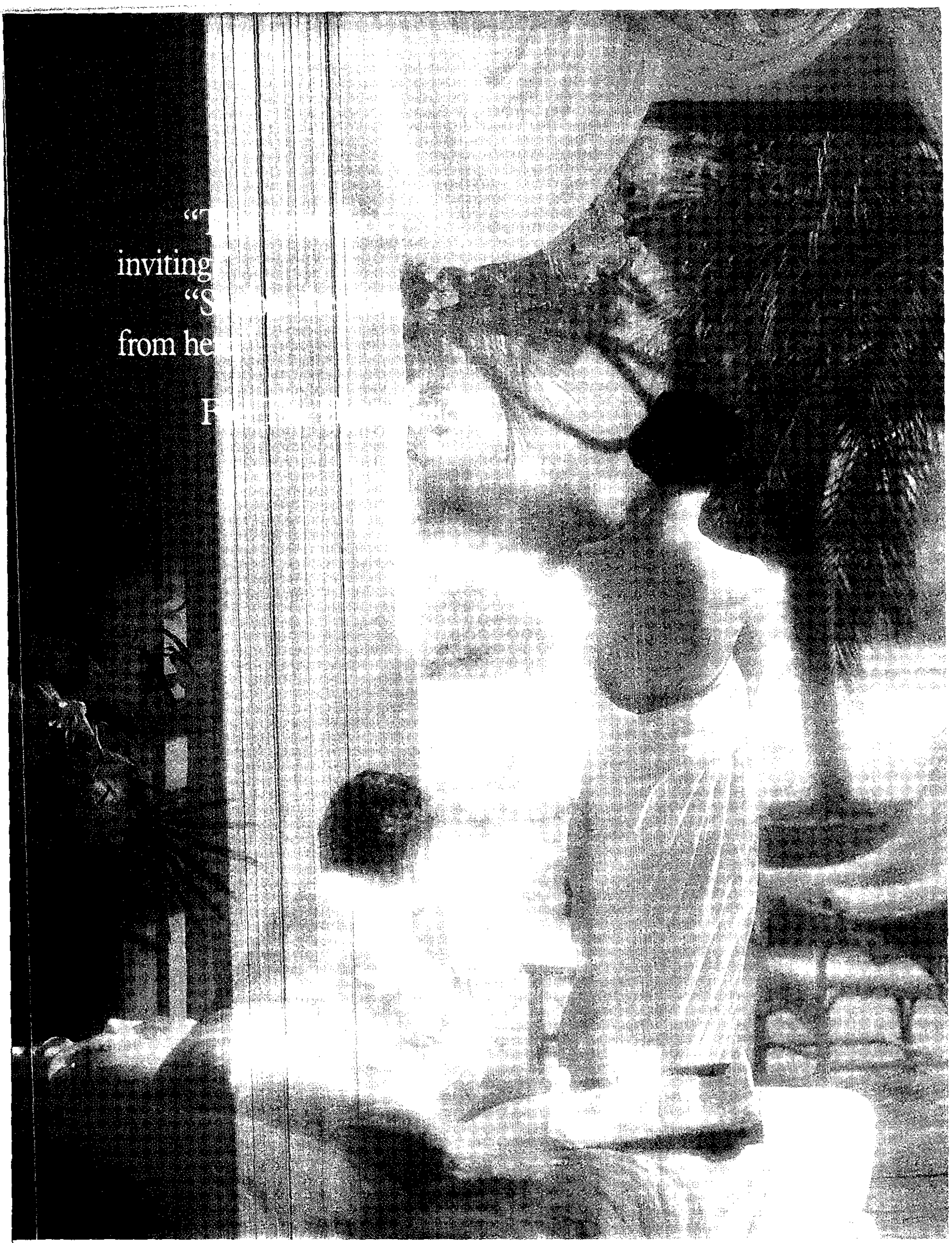

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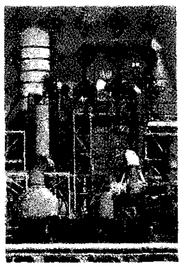

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CROSSED PATHS

Omar Khayyám and Lawrence of Arabia

• •

eters of her monstrous character. Dame Edna compels belief. (She won't reply to questions addressed to "Barry.") By maintaining Edna's persona, Humphries keeps the people around him playing his game. For both performer and public, it's an exercise in improvisation, but in this battle of wits the public is unarmed.

Dame Edna walks slowly down the back stairs toward the stage. She's a little ungainly on her pins, like an athlete in cleats on the concrete walkway from locker room to field. The stage is empty except for the drum kit of the three-piece band that accompanies the show. This is the first time since 1981 that Dame Edna has been on the Drury Lane stage—her 1987 show played the Strand—and she is all too aware of its history. "Guess what, possums?" her press release boasted. "I've just hired the most famous theatre on the planet." The boxes loom high and close above her. The space itself is expectant. Seats, lights, boxes, aisles all point toward center stage, where Dame Edna moves around, getting the feel of the Drury Lane's size and atmosphere. Dame Edna has a heavy-hipped, awkward, almost royal gait. She does not mince; her step has a thrust to it. "I like to acquaint myself with the empty auditorium," Humphries told me in 1981. "I make strange sounds, rather the way whales or dolphins do. I do a bit of vocal bouncing." Tonight, Dame Edna just comes to the front of the stage and starts confiding to no one in particular. "All you do is stand on the stage and talk to the people as though you were just talking on the phone," she says. "Just have a chat. . . . People make such a fuss about it. I hate shows, don't you, where you go and they're not talking to you, they're talking to each other. It's very rude."

From the shadows of the stalls Davidson answers back.

Dame Edna reacts. "Extremely rude," she says, "pretending the audience isn't there. . . . Imagine if you rang someone up and they were talking to someone else all the time?"

Dame Edna does some more vocal bouncing and then looks down toward the lightboard, where Dennis Smith is standing. "How's the box office?"

"People were lining up until three-thirty."

"We should bring them coffee," Dame Edna says, strolling over in my direction. (I'm in the wings.) "Who are the people in the news, Ian? Winnie Mandela. Has she been in the news? What's that film Dustin's done?"

" 'Rainman'!" I shout, obsessed, like everyone else, with getting Dame Edna tuned up for the challenge of opening night.

" 'Rainwoman,' " Dame Edna says, sharpish. "I was offered the part."

Davidson lobs something up about Roy Orbison's death.

"Little Roy," Dame Edna says. "One of the nicest albinos I ever knew." Dame Edna paces the stage in silence and then looks out toward her producer, who has moved to the front row. "What time are we starting the tech?"

"Seven-thirty."

"Perhaps I should have a nibble now. Come into the dressing room." Dame Edna starts off the stage, and is met by Dennis Smith. As she passes me in the wings, she says to her producer, "Look at this mysterious figure."

AT the start of the technical rehearsal, the BBC newsreader John Humphreys comes up on a screen that has dropped down in front of the Drury Lane proscenium. His grave and measured voice, which over the years has brokered many a world calamity to the citizens of Britain, is broadcasting the latest jolt to the national psyche. "Sad news, I'm afraid," he says, putting down the phone at his elbow which keeps a BBC newsreader

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in instant touch with his correspondents on breaking stories. "We've just had confirmed reports that one of Australia's most famous men has died. Mr. Norman Everage, husband of world-famous actress Dame Edna Everage, passed away peacefully in London just about an hour ago. Norman Everage was a shy, modest man. He distinguished himself as a soldier in the Second World War and married Edna May Beazley in the forties. They had three children: Bruce, Valmai, and Ken. However, soon after Mrs. Everage, as she then was, made the first of her highly successful public appearances, her husband developed a urological disorder for which he's been undergoing treatment for a quarter of a century."

Norman Everage never made an appearance in one of Dame Edna's shows, but Dame Edna had turned his prostate into legend. "Norm's prostate has been hanging over me for years," she confided onstage and in her autobiography, as the rolling joke of her browbeaten mate and their family changed with the times and with the rise of Edna's star. In "An Evening's Intercourse with Barry Humphries," Dame Edna told how Norm had to have his hands strapped to the sides of the hospital bed and was learning to knit with his mouth. "He's into oral socks," she explained.

Now another BBC reporter, Sue Cook, is pictured outside "the world's first prostate-transplant unit," interviewing doctors, nurses, and Dame Edna herself. The effect of seeing representatives of the real world incorporated into Dame Edna's fantasy is unnerving. But it's a confusion that Humphries relishes. For Dame Edna's autobiography, Humphries has chosen an epigraph from Benedetto Croce: "All history is fiction, just as all fiction is history." And Dame Edna makes a fiasco of history. Once, looking at a picture of Dame Edna amid the Royals which stood on his dressing-room table, Humphries said, "That's a joke in itself." And so it is. Dame Edna's mere presence at public occasions calls the reality of society into question.

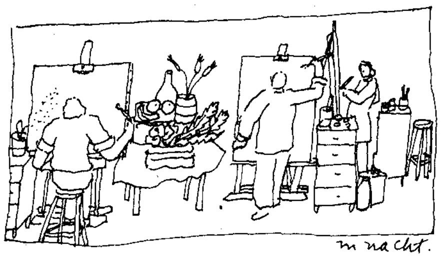
In the early days, Edna sometimes had to thrust herself into the paths of the famous, like Australian Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies, for whom she waited with a photographer until he appeared outside London's Savoy Hotel. "I'm one of your electors," she said as he snubbed her. "You're doing a fine job." But, as the souvenir program celebrates in snapshot, the famous now flock to Dame Edna. She is shown variously meeting and greeting a gallimaufry of the celebrated: the Queen Mother, Princess Diana, Joan Collins, Joan Baez, Bob Geldof, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Larry Hagman, Charlton Heston, Joan Rivers, Jeffrey Archer, and Mary Whitehouse, Britain's self-proclaimed moral guardian, whose righteousness Dame Edna both voices and lampoons.

At the end of the BBC broadcast, the newsreader looks out at the audience and says, "We have confirmation that Dame Edna has cancelled all stage performances. No money will be refunded. And that's the news tonight."

The screen flies up. The musicians are soon in place, ready for Humphries to start running through the material. The pianist puts a pad beside her on the bench to jot down any tasty one-liners that Humphries may improvise and want to put into the act. Humphries strolls out onstage wearing the head mike that fits under Edna's wig. He's in blue jeans, white socks, and sandals, an altogether unlikely Edna. He speeds through the prose portions of his act in double time: "And so and so and so and so and so. . . . I feel a song coming on!" In Edna's falsetto, Humphries launches into the boffo opening, a hymn to frivolity's refusal to suffer:

A minute ago
I was locked in my room.
My life seemed pointless and hollow,
Where before it was warm
With the presence of Norm,
And I thought "Where he's gone I must follow."
I looked at the Valium, I considered the stove,
I weighed up the stern moral issues.
But the strength inside me grew
When I was almost through
My last box of Kleenex tissues.
So I hope you'll all applaud my great achievement.
I am here tonight in spite of my bereavement. . . .

When Dame Edna sings about the triumph of fame over grief, her bigheartedness always admits the spirit of revenge, an impulse that is never far from the aggressive wellsprings of comedy. It's a game that Humphries, too, has been known to play with his public. He told the Australian Press Club in 1978, "In Melbourne I used to like sitting in a little Greek restaurant called Cafe Florentino at about eight-ten in the evening and seeing old Melbourne Grammar boys, contemporaries perhaps of our Prime Minister"—and himself—"hurrying with their wives down the stairs in order to attend one of my performances which I had absolutely no intention of starting for another three-quarters of an hour. The advantage, of course, of being a solo performer is that they can never start without you. And I think that is probably one of the few advantages, except it keeps me off the streets and fills my evening entertainingly."



Now Humphries stops the song to adjust the arrangement with the band: "Be nice if we could add a note there. A little Kurt Weillish note: 'And now you know / I'm too much of a pro / To let *yooooou* down.' "

After the song, Humphries descends into the stalls and sits talking with us as the crew gets the next set in place. He is a more reserved presence than the ebullient Dame Edna. Edna's voice is tight and sharp, but Humphries' voice is breathy and light. Where Edna is garish, Humphries is suave. Where she is direct and downright rude, he is oblique and well mannered. Edna is unaware of what she projects, and her lack of awareness empowers the public to laugh at her; Humphries is knowing, and his knowingness keeps those around him at a distance and on the defensive. His smile is tired tonight, but the furrowed laugh lines around his mouth and his high, fleshy cheekbones give his face a dramatic—even youthful—definition. His eyes, when they focus on you, are bright and warm, and convey a very definite sense of authority.

Dame Edna's biases are there for the world to see, but Humphries is much harder to fathom. As one would expect of a comedian who treads so gracefully between insight and outrage, Humphries is a man of intelligence and taste. Dame Edna says the first thing that pops into her airhead, but Humphries listens. He is reflective, choosing his words carefully and well. Humphries has talked of a feeling of "allegiance to the fellowship of music-hall artistes," but his articulacy separates him from the old-timers whose glorious tradition he is carrying almost single-handed into the twenty-first century. Buster Keaton had two days of official schooling; Charlie Chaplin learned a new word a day; Bert Lahr built up his vocabulary by doing crossword puzzles. But Humphries, whose act combines lowbrow antics with a highbrow aesthetic, is both well educated and well read, as the range of images and references in his conversation displays.

A stuntman and a stuntwoman are having trouble wiring themselves up for Humphries' most outrageous effect—the spectacle of paupers plummeting from a box seat. So Humphries turns back to me and begins talking. "My German Expressionist touch," he says of the stunt. "I like to produce this in the theatre, and I like to combine it with comedy. I was in the film society at university, and I deliberately disinterred a lot of German Expressionist films. I liked the kind of spooky, rather frightening effects that some of these actors produced in the movies. I very much liked the sense of melodrama and—what are they?—the *frissons*. I don't know why I liked shocking people. I think it just gave me a sense of identity. I guess it gave me a sense of power, too, because I felt rather powerless and swamped by—well, the dullness of Melbourne. Although I'm very fond of it, Melbourne is a transcendentally dull city. I was rather puritanical in those early days, and moralistic. Anxious to *show* people. Edna was conceived as a character to remind Australians of their bigotry and all the things that I found offensive. She was a rebuke. She was a silly, bigoted, ignorant, self-satisfied Melbourne housewife. They're still around. They're still there. Now they just wear a different uniform. They drive Volvos and occasionally swear. No one before me in Australia had looked at the suburbs and said, 'Here is the stuff of comedy.' It's only when Edna took on a life of her own, when she was invested *with a life*, that she turned the tables on me, in a way."

The stuntman yells down that they're ready, so Humphries hoists himself up and goes back onstage to work through "The Gladdy Song," which is the segue out of his coup de théâtre. "Now let's try and throw a few gladdies up

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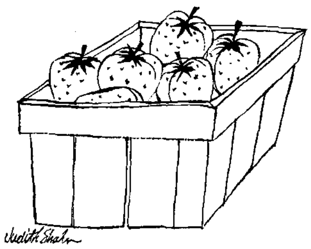
to the paupers," Humphries says in an uninflected Edna voice, not lingering to act the words. " 'I don't think I can. But I *will* . . . uh . . . uh . . . uh. . . .' " Humphries mimes the backhanded flip with which for a quarter of a century he has been heaving what Edna calls the Australian national flower at the audience. The drummer does a rim shot as each imaginary gladdy lands in the audience.



"What about me, Dame Edna?" the stuntwoman, sitting on the balcony railing, calls, waving.

"Oh, I don't think I can. Uh . . . uh . . ."

"AAAAAAAH!" The woman tips out over the box, dragging the stuntman with her. They dangle above the empty stalls like rock climbers rappelling a cliff.

"Can you see them?" Humphries asks, as the woman swings on wires and a halter concealed by her dress. "Will enough people see that?"

"Everybody and his dog will see that," Dennis Smith says.

The stuntwoman and the stuntman are hauled back into the box, and Humphries continues running the lines. "You all right? What a miracle there was a rope ladder up there, paups! Heaven be praised."

"We love you, Dame Edna!"

"Oh, you move me when you say that, lemming. Wouldn't it be ghastly if that happened every night?" Even in rehearsal, the line gets a laugh from the crew.

"On first night at the Strand, they dropped out of the top box like that," Ian Davidson says. "Someone from the stalls—an intrepid man—ran up on the box below and climbed out on the ledge to help the woman. Thereafter, they had to have someone standing in the corridor to stop anyone trying to make a brave rescue. The man was terribly brave. The box wasn't as high as this, but it was still damned high. I can't imagine any other comedian who would have such a stunt take place in an auditorium—have such amazing, riveting attention taken away from him in that way. It all rebounds to Edna's benefit, but even so . . ."

The smoke machine starts working, and the cherry picker moves onstage. "I see. That's good," Humphries says. "Tell me, have you got nice color on that? Are there flashing lights? Great blasts of color?"

Humphries, whose first ambition was to be a painter, thinks visually, and his shows make striking stage pictures. In the past, he has tried to shoot gladioli into the balcony with a cannon, fielded people's shoes from the stalls in a butterfly net, pulled a rip cord on his dress that turned its front into a Union Jack. But in having Dame Edna rise fifty feet above his audience at the finale of "Back with a Vengeance!" Humphries has topped himself. "It's a parody of the Assumption as though painted by Murillo or perhaps a late-Venetian master," he says.

Humphries locks himself in the basket as the crane begins to work through "Shyness," Edna's last song. As he has instructed, the cherry picker moves him slowly downstage and then thrusts him out and up over the stalls. Just the sight of Humphries suspended in air makes those of us in the audience laugh. The machine judders. Humphries grasps the rails. "There's terrible lurches down there," he says in his own persona, and the word "lurches" reverberates in the sound system. "Hello, paupers!" Humphries says in Edna's brightest falsetto. "I feel like Edna Poppins up here. I do. I hope I don't do anything involuntary. Be it on your heads if I do."

Even without costume and disguise, Humphries in Edna's voice whips up the tired crew and the scattered audience as the band builds to the song's climax. And when Dame Edna says, "Was it good for you, too, possums?" down below all of us shout "Yes!"

A STRANGE lassitude fills the theatre the next day, in the final hours before the opening. Humphries' dresser, Katie Harris, has turned a costume trunk into a table—a kind of altar of artifice, on which many of the disembodied features of Humphries' characters are on view. The table holds Dame Edna's natural wisteria wig, her rings and diamanté bracelets, Sir Les's fluorescent-green socks and his brown-and-white platform shoes, whose soles are stamped "Made from genuine dead kangaroo." There is also a box of black-and-white publicity postcards of Humphries in bow tie, with one eye hidden under the brim of his fedora and the other eye glaring up at the viewer. "I look like a minor Surrealist painter in that," he says.

Humphries, who has described himself as "an Aussie arriviste," is a dandy. He has a deep knowledge of fin-de-siècle Europe and the aesthetes who made a romance of individualism. Over the years, Humphries has affected the dandy's advertisements of impertinence and leisure: the monocle, the walking stick, the silk polka-dot cravat or bow tie, the long hair. In his Dimitri Major tailored suits and his Jermyn Street shirts, he cuts a fine, colorful figure. Through Dame Edna, Humphries allows the audience to share and to excuse the dandy's thrill at bad taste and his aristocratic pleasure in giving offense. Through Dame Edna, he vents both the dandy's insolent superiority and his rebellion against the rigidities of the workaday world, using wit to bend the world to him. Through Dame Edna, Humphries' progress in English and Australian society has been impressive. Even Prince Charles, an Ednabopper of long standing, comes occasionally to Humphries' house in Hampstead for dinner.

Humphries takes his mail and sits down at his dressing table, where his makeup and brushes have been laid out as meticulously as instruments in an operating theatre. Aerosols of hair spray and deodorant, pots of makeup, a polishing pen for Edna's nails, a bottle of Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce (the finishing touch to Sir Les's ruffled tuxedo shirt) are ranged against the back mirror. At his right hand is a small palette for blending the makeup; at his left is Sir Les's snaggletoothed denture. A white towel has been placed in the center of the dressing table, and on it are three sable brushes and two Hudson's Eumenthol jujubes. To the left of the makeup but no less important to Humphries' backstage ritual is the telephone.

Humphries is reading through the stack of mail. A woman in Blackpool writes to complain that she's been upset for two days over Dame Edna's mockery of bereavement. A single parent in Surrey giggles along in Edna's idiom ("gladdies," "possums," "nice"). Someone has cut out an ad for the show and scrawled across it, "Take that shit off your face and do some work you lazy bugger." And Margaret in Bournemouth wants six hundred pounds, to redecorate her flat: "Dearest darling

Dame Edna, will you be my Fairy godperson and grant my tiny little wish."

Humphries himself is hardly ensconced in luxury. The dressing room consists of a small changing room and a large, dingy waiting room with a sofa bed, two chairs, and a table on which bottles of soft drinks and mineral water have been set out for opening night. Bouquets from well-wishers have been arranged around the room, but nothing can renovate its drabness. There is not a picture on the wall, not a new lick of paint. The sense of color, texture, fun which so distinguishes Humphries' performances onstage is entirely absent from the gray room, as if all energy and imagination were being saved for the front of the house. But the barrenness and boredom that the dressing room exudes provide the climate that feeds the exasperation that Humphries turns into outrageousness. "I'm always conscious of the desert inside Australia, of the vacuum," he has said. "Sunday afternoon in Melbourne, the exquisite boredom. The exhilarating depression. Neat houses. Somewhere down the street there's a Celica being cleaned; otherwise no sign of life. That appeals to me in a terrible way. But I feel, too, there's a decadence, among all the health and the prosperity." Edna is a product of a subversive imagination that sees itself as "sinking artesian wells into the suburban desert, drawing up composite portraits." The notion pleases him. "I'm in the boredom-alleviation business, aren't I? This art is meant to be an antidote to boredom," Humphries says, speaking as much for himself as his audience.

HUMPHRIES has described himself as "self-educated, attended Melbourne Grammar School." The man who would become a dandy of delirium traces the origins of his rebellion to the oppressiveness of the city's poshest educational institution—the one that the upwardly mobile Humphries family chose for their firstborn son, and to which he was admitted in 1947, at the age of thirteen. Humphries was not happy with the choice and has spoken of the move from his friends at Camberwell Grammar School as "a great bereavement." The trauma has never been forgiven by Humphries or forgotten by Melbourne Grammar. In 1953, Humphries was sensationally banned from the Old Melburnians association for his irreverent sculpture "Old Fool's Tie": a bottle of beer with a Melbourne Grammar tie knotted around it. He was eventually welcomed back, and made an equally sensational return to the fold at an Old Melburnians night in his honor, in 1971: he entered riding on a camel.

Dame Edna owes her paternity in part to Humphries' fierce disgust at the blinkered conformity of the school and its masters, whom he has called in print "picturesque ignoramuses." Humphries says, "I became attracted to the modern school of painting—that is to say, the modern school as it was in the second decade of the twentieth century. The Dadaist movement, and, later, the Surrealist artists, fascinated me very early. I was familiar with the works of Picabia, with the writings of Salvador Dalí, with most of the works of the French nineteenth-century writers. I knew all about Cubism, and was, indeed, painting in a Cubist style. So that I was, in fact, very precocious in my reading before I was thirteen." Already a talented painter in oils, Humphries had been introduced, through the influence of a Camberwell art teacher, Ian Bow, to "the exhilaration of eccentricity" and the ravishing thought of "what a marvellous liberating thing it must be to be an artist, to be able to escape from the humdrum world of mathematics, compulsory sport, gymnasium, cold showers, boxing, and all these terrible imperatives of a boys' school." When Humphries was five and his mother asked him what he wanted to be, he answered, "A genius." But Melbourne Grammar put no premium on originality. "It's significant that very, very few people of any artistic sensibility at all emerged from the school after the war," he has said. "But out of a kind of rebellion against the school system I developed certain techniques, which have been very useful in my subsequent artistic life—certain forms of rebellion and anarchy, certain artistic methods."

Humphries also hated the school uniform, which draped his dreamy artistic persona in a navy-blue serge version of a thirties business suit and turned him and the rest of the luckless internees of the school into "double-breasted, tie-pinned parodies of Ronald Colman or the Man from the Prudential." This later seemed to

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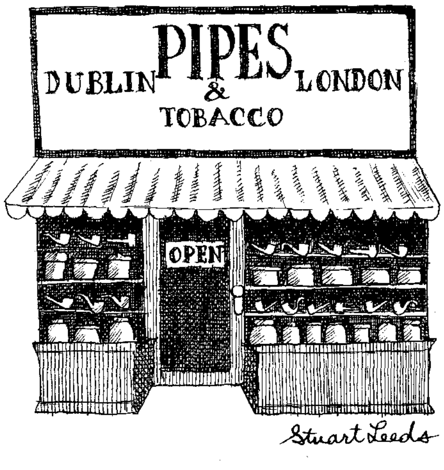
Humphries a self-fulfilling prophecy. "Most of my contemporaries at school entered the World of Business, the logical destiny of bores," he has written. The school's motto was "Pray and Work," but it was to sport and the homogeneity of attitude which games instill that the school seemed dedicated. Humphries was not, and never would be, a team player. "I hated sports. I still do," he says. His aversion to physical exercise earned him the nickname Grannie at Camberwell and Queenie at Melbourne Grammar.

Humphries' sport was frequenting secondhand bookshops—especially one on Bourke Street, whose owner, a Mrs. Bird, called him Mr. Humphries and imbued him with an enthusiasm he still holds for the "curdled late Romantics," like Ann Radcliffe, Monk Lewis, Charles Robert Maturin, Byron, and Mary Shelley. Even rummaging in the dusty shop among stacks of old volumes had maverick overtones for Humphries, because his parents insisted he have new books. "Schoolboys generally didn't go into secondhand bookshops," Humphries says. "One was discouraged from 'dirty books'—that is to say, books that other people had owned. It was a very hygienic society. Hygiene was a great god."

As a child, Humphries dreamed of being a magician. "The big advantage of being a magician," he says, "was that you could make people disappear." But at Melbourne Grammar he discovered that if he couldn't make the school disappear, his laughter could keep the people in it at bay. Humphries found himself in the dandy's dilemma: at once dominated by and attempting to dominate convention. In this delicate situation, wit was the acceptable face of insolence, and his school years were spent in the learning of effrontery. He recalls of his small circle of friends, "We sat in a rebellious and probably rather irritating little group at the back of the class, drawing attention, wherever possible, to areas of ignorance in the schoolmaster. These were considerable, I need hardly say." He acted out what he calls his "dandiacal rage" in caricature both of the teachers and of himself. "I had always drawn, particularly caricatures," he has said. "I used to do caricatures of teachers on the blackboard. So when they entered the classroom they could see themselves up there on the board to the amusement of others. I found I had a gift for amusing my schoolmates, which, in a way, protected me from bullies. If you could make them laugh, they wouldn't hit you."

A renegade reputation requires courage, and Humphries, a churchgoing and well-bred young man, had to summon it up. "It didn't come naturally to me," he says. "One had to impersonate a brazen person. One had to act as if one were courageous." He was emboldened by the sure knowledge that "I had absolutely no desire to be like *them*, whatever happened—*them* were these boys in school uniforms." Humphries grew his hair long. "By modern standards it wasn't long. But it was certainly long for the school, where they insisted 'Long hair is dirty hair.' I later had that translated into Latin—'*Crines longi, crines foetidi*'—and called it the motto of the school. There was such a strong emotional feeling about long hair. It aroused such primitive revulsion that I knew I was on the right track."

Although he bucked the system, he could not always beat it. He became the subject of scandal and concern when his ruse for avoiding sports was uncovered. Humphries had appeared in soccer gear and had his name ticked off, and had then slipped away to the lavatories, where an accomplice brought him his school uniform to put back on. "This went on for over a year," Humphries says. "One day, there was a tap on the door. It opened, and the captain of the school was standing there. He said, 'The game's up, Humphries.' I'll never forget those words. I was caned. It sometimes pleases me to think that this schoolboy, only a couple of years older than I was, who unmasked me so brutally and punished me so mercilessly, is now a traveller for a cheap brand of port. I think Dame Nature, as Edna would call it, has a way of settling some of these accounts." The humiliation was compounded by the headmaster, who called Humphries into his study and said, "I hope you're not turning pansy?" Humphries says, "I hadn't the *faintest* idea of what he meant, except that it was rather threatening. There was no way to formulate a reply to it."



Humphries' way of dealing with his anger was then, as it is now, to perform a kind of psychic jujitsu—to "throw people" by using the force of their attitude to defeat them. Having been labelled effeminate and made to attend soccer matches in the name of school spirit, Humphries sent up both injustices by sitting with his back to the playing field and knitting.

The older generation of clowns to whom Humphries is a legitimate successor took their urgency from poverty; Humphries took his urgency from privilege. They wanted a way into the mainstream; Humphries wanted a way out of it. "The word art never entered my head," Chaplin wrote, speaking of his time in music hall, before it did. And Keaton was equally matter-of-fact: "I never realized that I was doing anything but trying to make people laugh when I threw my custard pies and took my pratfalls." The Old Guard were inspired by business, not art. Humphries was inspired by art, not business. Even at grammar school, he felt a special kinship with the Dadaists and their subversive gestures of unreason. "I was instantly fired with admiration," he says of his first exposure to them, in William Gaunt's "March of the Moderns." "It seemed to me that even though these stunts had occurred forty years before, they still produced a *frisson* that was the kind of artistic performance I aspired to." Humphries wanted to create his own "ferocious Dada jests." He helped to form the Art Club and to start a Dadaist faction, which organized a sculpture exhibition at the school. The forces of authority won the first round against Humphries' aspiring anarchy: the Dada sculptures were judged too subversive and were withdrawn. But Humphries' gift for provocation, so carefully held in check in his Melbourne Grammar days, was unleashed on the world when he took up his infamous residence at Melbourne University, between 1951 and 1953.

"The only Australian who ever understood the Dada principle of *provocation*," Robert Hughes wrote in "The

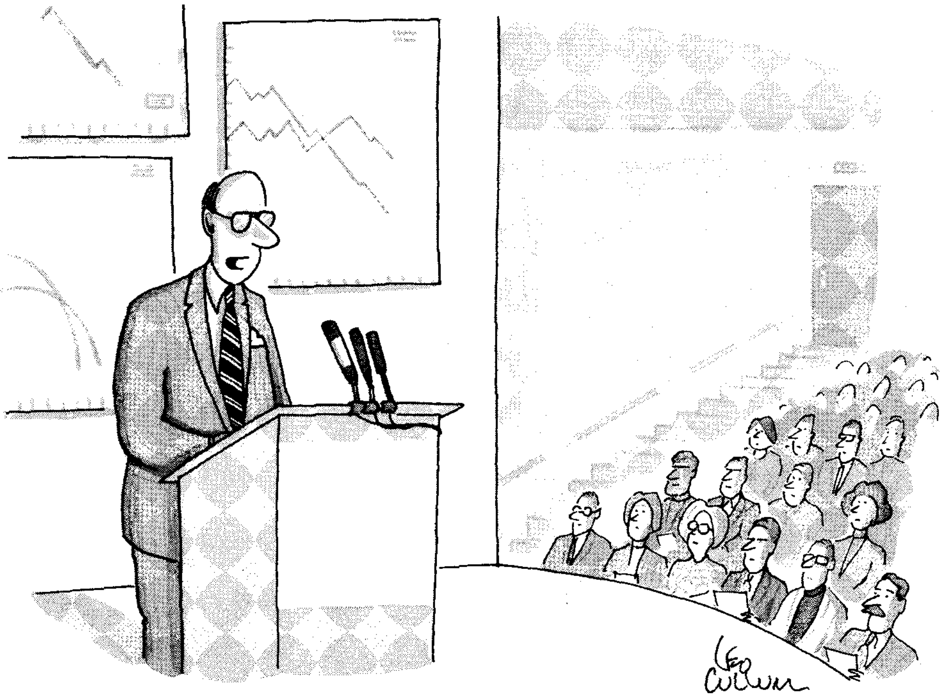
Art of Australia" (1966), "was the actor Barry Humphries, who organized two Dada shows in Melbourne and (before leaving for England in the late fifties) performed a number of gratuitous public acts whose ferocity and point might have pleased Tristan Tzara." The Dada exhibitions and the pranks made a legend both of Humphries' desire to shine and of his sense of displacement. "It was important to emancipate oneself from this suburban milieu, because it was so seductive and oppressive," Humphries says. "You thought it was inescapable. It was so disturbing. I had absolutely no idea of what I would do in life. I remember a friend of mine had a printing press. I had a visiting card made with my name on it. He said, 'We better put occupation.' I said, 'Put "Dilettante."' A very effective card to have. In fact, it didn't entertain me very much to be a dilettante. I became a specialist."

The first Pan-Australasian Dada Exhibition, in 1952, announced Humphries' expertise at creating a panic. "I had packages printed up called Platytox—really just sawdust in packages," Humphries recalls. "It was a 'poison' to put in creeks and streams to kill the platypus, which is a very much protected, loved, endearing indigenous Australian animal. In fact, if I were to be given a chance to save a platypus, at some risk to myself, I would probably attempt it. So why have an exhibit that offers a pesticide to destroy these animals? *Because* everything was in its place in Australia. On the package it said in small print that it was also rather good for Aboriginals. Aboriginals didn't exist: in a way, one was led to believe that they lived a long way away and were dying out anyway, which was terribly sad, but there it was. This was all part of the tyranny of niceness and order. I didn't want to *overthrow* order. I just instinctively wanted to give it a bit of a *jolt*, so that people could *see* it."

"Pox Vobiscum" was the motto of Melbourne University's Dada group, which put on the second exhibition, in 1953. Members of the public who strolled into the lounge of the Student Union and were surrounded by the sound of diabolical laughter counterpointed by a record rigged to repeat, from "South Pacific," "And you will note there's a lump in my throat / I'm in love, I'm in love, I'm in love . . ." soon got the splenetic message. Humphries had filled a pair of Wellington boots full of custard and titled it "Pus in Boots." Under the title "Her Majesty's Male," Queen Elizabeth II was shown with five-o'clock shadow. In both exhibitions, the punning titles of many of the works disabused art of its gravity and proclaimed Dada's faith in life as a joke: "Yes, We Have No Cezannas," "Roof of the Cistern Chapel," "Portrait of James Juice," "Christopher Fried," "Erasmus-Tazz," "My Foetus Killing Me," "Puree of Heart." Humphries created a series of works that rotted and smelled, in order to satirize the notion of genteel art collecting. He produced "Shoescapes" from old shoes, "Stinkscapes" from lambs' eyes, "Cakescapes" from cake pressed between glass to create a kind of Jackson Pollock abstraction. To a local newspaper he explained, "Here are the artistic media which best express the multifaceted image of Australian life—cake, shoes, and tomato sauce. From footwear, custard, and chutney you can create the Old Masters of the future."

"Dada shows its truth in action," Tzara said. Inevitably, Humphries and the Dada group were drawn toward performance. Their Dada revue, "Call Me Madman" (1952), achieved notoriety. The furor was caused not by the blanks being fired over the audience's head, or by the din of the orchestra playing combs, bottles, and gongs, or by the spectacle of Humphries dressed as a nun and singing "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate." What made the front page of the Melbourne *Sun* was the finale, "The Indian Famine." A missionary sat across a table from his wife, played by Humphries minimally disguised in a dress over his suit. The table was piled high with cauliflower, cake, and raw meat. "It looked like a harvest festival," Humphries recalls. The missionary read aloud statistics of a recent famine. As each horrific figure was announced, the wife laughed and repeated, "I don't care, I've got plenty of food, lots of food. And they've got nothing." Humphries says, "The point was crudely moral in order to dramatize public indifference to these kinds of catastrophes and to provoke respectable undergraduate audiences into some kind of irrational behavior, some kind of demonstrative feeling."

Humphries succeeded all too well. As the missionary's broadcast of statistics grew louder, so did the wife's hysterical laughter. They started throwing food at each other, and some food found its way into the audience. The



"I want each of you on the way home tonight to stop, look up, ponder the heavens, and consider how insignificant our second-quarter loss really is."

• •

audience started hurling the food at the actors, who, in turn, threw it back at them. A food fight had begun. "We had an audience of affluent Australian university students throwing perfectly good food about the auditorium while statistics about the current famine were being broadcast over the amplifiers at them—an act therefore of total anarchy," Humphries explains. "The satirical intention is very apparent in all this. It eluded the audience, however, who stormed the stage, after my blood. I remember hiding in the broom cupboard under the stage." The Dada group was banned from ever again using the Student Union theatre.

d. ehrenberg

Humphries also started making a spectacle of himself. He cultivated his myth. "I was entertained by the idea of slightly fictionalizing myself," he says. His tailored suits, his still longer hair, his mauve ink (an affectation acquired from reading Ronald Firbank) heralded the dandy's intention of inhabiting a world of his own. Humphries gathered around him a group of women he dubbed "hoydens" and "doxies," one of whom was Germaine Greer. "He would dress them up as schoolgirls and passionately kiss them in the street," the Australian critic Clive James reports in his essay "Approximately in the Vicinity of Barry Humphries." When the police arrived, birth certificates would be produced.

And so began a series of legendary pranks, in which Humphries moved "from a visual vocabulary to a theatrical one." In one notorious escapade, Humphries had an accomplice, John Perry, dress as a blind man and take a seat in a non-smoking compartment of a Melbourne commuter train. As Humphries has described it: "Perry was reading Braille. How anyone in a non-smoking compartment of a commuter train could have mistaken a piano roll for Braille, goodness knows. John was reading a piano roll. He had dark glasses and his leg was in a cast. He aroused an enormous amount of curiosity and pity, I should think, on the long journey into town. So when, at a certain stop, in came a rather garishly dressed, long-haired youth, smoking gold-tipped cigarettes between the wrong fingers, and reading a foreign-language newspaper—very foreign-looking—immediately they looked. First of all, I'd given them plenty of time to feel compassion and admiration for this man. Then in comes another figure, smoking in a non-smoking compartment, reading a *foreign* newspaper, long hair. So another emotion takes over. Then the foreign person looks down at the blind man and, as he's about to get out of the train a couple of stops later, unleashes a volley of foreign-sounding gibberish, grabs the Braille, tears the paper, kicks at the blind man's leg, and tears off his glasses and throws them on the floor. Then he gets off the train. The commuters were invariably transfixed with horror. No one ever pursued me. Mind you, I ran as fast as I could. People tried to comfort John Perry. He would always say 'Forgive him.' It was also very funny to do, and very hard not to laugh. It's a bit hard to say what effect the stunt was meant to have, since it was meant to amuse us, a kind of outrageous public act."

The pranks turned life into "a mini-spectacle with me as the audience," Humphries says. They also gave him a "theatrical thrill," which he explains as "changing people's lives slightly by making them the witness to some rather remarkable and absolutely inexplicable thing that could not happen in real life." It was a dangerous sport, but one Humphries experimented with after he'd dropped his university studies (law, then liberal arts) and joined the repertory theatre on the Melbourne University campus, in the mid-fifties. The actress Zoe Caldwell was part of the same repertory and got caught up in Humphries' masquerade. "He used to do a very strange thing," she says. "He would pretend to be a spastic, a genuine spastic. People would pity him. It's still in Dame Edna—he pushes responses in people. But they're responses we should feel ashamed of. He forces you to feel emotions. I was his sister. That's what he cast me as. It wasn't my idea of a swell night out. We'd go to a restaurant and ask for tea. The waitress would bring the tea, and he'd take the milk and pour it on his head. The girl was trying to keep her patience. Then Barry would pour the sugar on the floor. He did the whole thing, never stopped. Watching people pity him and pity me, I knew what he was after—false sentiment. He wanted to see what reactions people had to disability. Barry forced you to look at the ugly and the monstrous. He was trying it out. The genesis of what he wanted to trap—bogus emotion, denial, what we all do—was there. I think he wanted to trap it and say 'Look, look what you do.' And so he's outrageous. At parties, he used to sing:

Lasso that spasso
And beat him till he's sweatin'
Lasso that spasso
I'm a'hangin' on to this here cretin. . . .

"People would say 'How cruel,' or 'Oh, Barry!' That's the response he wanted. He was trying to provoke and entrap their sentimentality. I see this in Edna Everage, only now Barry makes people laugh. He didn't make people laugh much at the time. He's now wonderful as Edna because he's so free, as if he's found exactly what's right for him."

"YOU can come in, John." Humphries is dialling a number, speaking to my reflection in the left-hand corner of his dressing mirror. "They want me to close the Prince's Trust performance. Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr., Kiri Te Kanawa, and Liza Minnelli will be on the bill, too." He puts down the telephone and turns to face me: relaxed, excited, already watching Edna's persona go by. "I have to come on late, because of my show. I suppose I'll do 'My Public' and change the lyrics. But what about them? I don't know too much about them!"

"Well, Sammy Davis is black, one-eyed, and Jewish."

Humphries' eyes drift away into thought. He mumbles a snatch of song: "I'm better off than Sammy." And then, with a clap of high-pitched laughter, he turns back, beaming: " 'I may be overtired and fluish / But at least I'm not one-eyed and black and Jewish.' Dare I sing that? They'd never allow it on television!"

The phone rings. "Hello, Stephen." Humphries launches into a description of a dress he saw in a Parisian revue which he wants Stephen Adnitt, his designer, to copy. "It had mirrors on it. Actually around the neck. A kind of

V neck or yoke of mirrors. They were rather chunky tiles, almost. . . . No, but you can imagine what happened when the lights hit them, because they were separate and moved with the fabric a bit. They sent these rays straight out into the audience."

Edna began life, in the mid-fifties, dressed from secondhand-clothing shops. And as she has progressed in confidence and class, so have her costumes. Humphries' ever-changing satire on modern manners is inevitably a satire on modern fashion. Over the last twenty years, Dame Edna has become a clotheshorse of many colors. She herself explained the transformation to London's *Sunday Telegraph* in 1987: "As late as the early 1970s, I was still really dressing like a tourist, buying off the peg in Oxford Street. I wore a tweed overcoat which may have come from C. & A.; white vinyl Courrèges-style boots, a hangover from the 1960s; and a felt hat in autumnal colours." But since the late seventies, when she declared herself a superstar, Dame Edna has been in the vanguard of fashion, exploiting the punk leather look, the denim look, the tennis look. For her cantata "The Song of Australia," she wore a dress that opened in front to reveal the Australian coat of arms lit up, flashing a kangaroo and an emu holding a shield. Offstage, a stagehand pulled a string, and a cape unfolded behind Edna like wings, adding decibels to the applause. After Princess Di attended the Cannes Festival in a puffball dress, Dame Edna had one made up, complete with a Windsor Castle hat bearing a flag that could be run up on the turret, and little corgis on the brim. Dame Edna has also attempted (and failed) to crash the Royal Enclosure at Ascot wearing a behemoth hat in the shape of the Sydney Opera House, with a shark-infested bay as the brim.

"And, Stephen," Humphries says, "also remember on the bill are Liza Minnelli, Sammy Davis, Jr., Frank Sinatra, Kiri Te Kanawa—I have to excel them *all*."

Dennis Smith and the stage manager, Harriet Bowdler, come into the dressing room. Humphries sings Smith the lines about Sammy Davis, Jr. "In superb taste," says Smith, who bears a handful of opening-night telegrams and a memo about the charity performance.

Humphries goes into the bathroom to freshen up. The pre-opening orders to the ushers from the Drury Lane stage sound through the loudspeakers in Humphries' dressing room. "They've adjusted the speakers," Bowdler says. "Barry gets most upset if we play a theatre and the show relay doesn't come back to the dressing room. He likes to hear the audience."

"He often says 'Listen to them,' " Katie Harris says, scuttling into the dressing room with Sir Les's padding.

Bowdler says, " 'Is it a nice crowd?' he'll say. 'Who's out there?' He likes to know people are waiting. Sometimes he just needs to know they're waiting."

Humphries comes out of the bathroom and sits on the edge of the sofa bed, which has been made up in the waiting room. "I think I'm going to have a ten-minute nap, John." He pulls down the coverlet. "It'll go all right tonight, don't you think?"

"YOUR attention please, ladies and gentlemen. Contrary to the television broadcast you have just seen, we have received word that a world-famous woman is speeding to this theatre under police escort in the Ednamobile. The management have little doubt that if this proves to be Dame Edna and that she has indeed decided to keep faith with her devoted public and give you a show tonight the generous-hearted men and women of good will in this audience will give this courageous woman and widow a standing ovation rarely witnessed in the annals of the British theatre."

A crash of cymbals. A spotlight. And there, at the front of the stalls, is Dame Edna, in her widow's weeds. "Hello, possums!" she shouts, waving and smiling and vaulting up the stairs to the stage in her slightly bowlegged gait. "Hello, darlings. Hello, possums." She beams as she crosses the stage.

"I'm glad I stepped onto the stage now, possums. I am. I am. When I first heard that Norm had been axed by the Big Rupert Murdoch in the sky, I phoned up my shrink in L.A. Dr. Marvin K. Schadenfreude, M.D. I share him with little Elton John, little Michael Jackson, and big Sylvester. I said, 'Doctor, what am I going to do?' And he said, 'Let it all hang out, Edna.' I said, 'That's what Norm did. And look where it got him!' He said, 'Time is a miracle healer. Only Time can heal.' And he was so right. Because that was—

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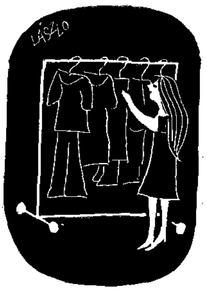
what?—four hours ago. And already I'm feeling *marvellous.* I am."

HE was born John Barry Humphries, in the Melbourne suburb of Kew, on February 17, 1934, the first of Eric and Louisa Humphries' four children. Although it would be wrong to consider Edna merely Humphries' alter ego, it would also be wrong to consider her just "this woman you inhabit," which was Graham Greene's description. Edna originated as a totem of Humphries' sense of displacement both from his milieu and from his parents. "I invented Edna because I hated her," he said. "I suppose one grows up with a desire to murder one's parents, but you can't really go and do that. So I suppose I tried to murder them symbolically onstage. I poured out all my hatred of the standards of little people of their generation." As a comic caricature, Edna allowed Humphries to turn the infuriating fears of his parents against them.



Edna is, among other things, a son's disturbing view of his mother. Edna talks but never listens. She asks questions only to double-bind her interlocutors. She is a queen of control. "You're tired. You're overexcited," she says, turning fiercely on her infantilized audience. "There'll be tears before bedtime!" What Edna claims about herself and what the audience perceives about her are different matters. She is "approachable" and devastating, "nice" and devouring, "caring" and callous, "intimate" and detached. She contains a son's envy of his mother's power to be at once the agent of joy and the means of eradication.

Louisa Humphries looked on her son with bemusement. "Where did you come from, Barry?" she used to say to him when he was a child. "We never knew where you came from."

"My mother would very frequently express surprise at me, which reinforced my adoption fantasy," Humphries says. "My father became very successful. I didn't see a great deal of him. He was always very, very busy." Humphries pictures Eric Humphries—a third-generation builder, whose father immigrated to Australia from Lancashire—as surrounded by the drawing boards, set squares, drawing pins that were the tools of his trade and the source of the increasing wealth that helped him move from Oldsmobile to Buick and on to Mercedes in the fifties. "My mother was a distant figure as well," he says. "I think she had a period of illness. I think she was sent away for a bit. It might have been as little as a fortnight, but it seemed months to a child."

The Humphries family lived in a two-story neo-Georgian cream brick house in Camberwell, the most fashionable new suburb of Melbourne, on the Golf Links estate and looking down Marlborough Avenue. Outside, in the spacious world of herbaceous borders and rolling lawns, Humphries sensed an "unneighborly feeling." His parents didn't fraternize much with the neighbors. "It was thought not altogether 'nice' to know people very well," Humphries says about the general "lack of intimacy," which also prevailed in the world inside his house. By the age of six, Humphries was withholding his deepest hurts from his parents. "I was puzzled even then by the mysterious lack of rapport which seemed to have grown up between parents and child."

The incident that prompted this recollection was a schoolyard quarrel at the detested South Camberwell State School ("I still drive past in order to see if I can revive my hatred of the school: I do so without any difficulty"), which Humphries briefly attended before entering Camberwell Grammar. "Once, a whole crowd of bullies set upon me in a corner of the arid and ashen playground, because I had a toy submarine they envied," he recalled. "They'd seized handfuls of gravel to pelt me, and in self-defense I threw a handful back at them and was immediately reported for throwing stones to Miss Jensen, the woman in charge of our class. Miss Jensen preferred to take their testimony against my own, and she threatened to take me to the headmaster. Waiting to see the headmaster, I was placed in a corner of the classroom, in front of everyone, with a note on my back. 'I am a bully,' said the note. 'I am a bully.' So I was subjected to this humiliation, and after that I broke down and confessed that in fact I had been culpable—when, of course, I knew I hadn't really—to avoid the ultimate vengeance of a confrontation with the headmaster. This filled me with very uncomfortable feelings for many, many years. I've often thought to this day of taking some form of revenge upon Miss Jensen if she is still alive, some kind of incomprehensible vengeance—to find her in some place of retirement and inflict upon her some mild punishment, some bewildering punishment. It would make me feel better."

Humphries found impersonating Edna "very therapeutic and liberating." He says, "I was finally more comfortable as Edna, because I was more heavily disguised. I could relax in the character. It was like a girl who suddenly discovers she has a career in prostitution. On the one hand, she suddenly thinks, Oh, I've got a job. And, on the other hand, Well, actually, it's a job my parents aren't going to be too happy about."

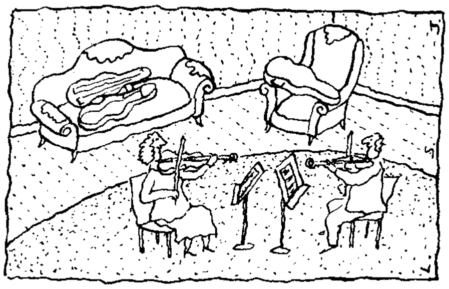
Humphries' parents were vociferously disapproving of their son's vocation. "A man does all he can for his kids and what does he get for it?" was the beginning of one of Eric Humphries' familiar litanies, which his son put verbatim into one of his lesser caricatures, the successful businessman Colin Cartwright. "Things were going well for *him* professionally," Humphries says of his father. "Then, suddenly, I seemed to be what Vance Packard called the 'slip generation,' the one who was going to blow it all. I shared his anxiety but didn't let on. What, indeed, would I be? I was tortured with wondering. It certainly couldn't be anything I was good at or enjoyed—it had to be something else." At first, his parents boycotted his shows, and, even with his success, Louisa refused to see her son perform his priapic Sir Les Patterson. "Only later did my father come," Humphries says. "He went to a theatre in Melbourne. The box-office lady said to me, 'Oh, your father's such a nice man.' I said, 'When did you meet him?' She said he'd come in that morning. He wanted to buy all the tickets in the theatre and give them to his friends. He was very surprised to learn they were sold out. He was convinced no one would come."

To his mother Humphries was, according to him, "guilty of letting down the side, a frequent crime." An elegant woman, Louisa was adored and spoiled by her husband, whose preoccupation with his business left her ruling the roost at home. "My mother wasn't a particularly warm woman," Humphries says. "She had artistic qualities that were *all* suppressed." Louisa was judgmental and could make her disapproval felt. When Humphries told her he had met the Queen after a command performance at the Palladium, she replied, "I hope you were wearing a nice *suit*." Humphries wasn't. "She had a very oblique way of paying you a compliment, always very recondite," Humphries says. "It didn't seem necessary to inform her that I was wearing a dress." But, even before acting and Edna, Humphries had difficulty in making his mother see him for himself. She once asked him to return the gift of a pair of earrings he'd bought her. "This was a very wounding experience for a child," he says.

The problem of being properly accepted remained an issue between them in his adulthood. Humphries tells of returning from London to Melbourne to show off to Louisa his newborn son Oscar, the first child of his now dissolved third marriage, to the painter Diane Millstead. "She had not met her grandson," he recalls. "As I arrived home, I noticed my mother listening to the transistor radio. I came forward to present my son to her, and she was cautioning me, 'Listen! Listen!' It was a typical Australian disk jockey on a phone-in program. He happened to be talking about me. Was I good for Australia or not? It was generally felt that I was doing Australia a great disservice by my impersonations—particularly that of Sir Les Patterson, this anachronistic figure. My mother was saying, 'Sh-h-h . . . sh-h-h . . . listen!' People were ringing up and saying things like 'Well, I haven't seen one of Barry's shows, but from what I've heard it's a disgrace.' This disk jockey by impugning my patriotism was inflating his own reputation. My mother said, pointedly, 'You see? That's what they think. That's what they think of you!' I was so incensed that I should come home and my mother should be listening to this rubbish, and not dismissing it, instead of greeting me and her grandson, that I went into another room. I telephoned the radio station as Edna. I got through using the voice of Edna. I said that this was Dame Edna and I was on a brief visit to Australia and I was listening to the program about Barry Humphries and I heartily agreed with these women. I said, 'Not only do I agree with what these women said about Barry Humphries but I happen to know that Barry Humphries' mother thinks *exactly* the same.' "

DAME EDNA is out of widow's black now and into iridescent celebrity red. "Eat your heart out, Tina Turner!" she shouts, unveiling the short, fringy dress in which she hymns her dead husband, her public, and her professionalism. The audience is in a party mood. Someone hidden in the shadows of a box throws a chartreuse-and-yellow card, and it lands with a clatter at Edna's feet. She kicks the missive offstage, and Harriet Bowdler retrieves it. "I LOVE YOU," it reads. "Hays, known as 'Hayseed' from Kentucky. 1st bloke in 1st box on left."

Edna, too, is talking of love: "I love to hear laughter. I call it Vitamin L, what an essential part of our spiritual diet it is, isn't it, possums? Norman and I—oh, how we used to love to laugh. We were always playing little jokes on each other. And it's not easy, is it, playing jokes on institutionalized loved ones. Huh. But every April Fools' Day we had a little jest with each other. I remember last April the first . . . hah! . . . We pretended to Norm . . . hah! . . . he was going to be discharged from the hospital. Ha, ha! Isn't that gorgeous? You could do that with a loved one. The matron helped, too. She packed his little case so he could watch her doing it out of the corner of the mirror above his page-turning machine. He's had 'The Thornbirds' open at the same page for the last seven years. (Who hasn't?) Anyway, they got him into his dressing gown, and he shuffled down to the front of the hossie, where they had an ambulance ticking over. And just as Norm was about to fall into the ambulance. . .hee, hee . . . *it whizzed off down the driveway!* Ah, ha, ha! . . . He fell flat on his face in the gravel. And all the doctors and nurses leant out the windows and said, 'April Fool!' . . . Ha, ha! . . . I wish Norm could have laughed at that. . . . Oh dear . . . oh, but I'm a lucky, lucky woman, because I was born with a priceless gift. 'What gift is that, Dame Edna?' I hear you saying. . . . The ability to laugh at the misfortunes of others. . . . And, you know, that keeps me cheerful twenty-four hours a day, it does!"



EDNA frequently criticizes Humphries in public and in the press. (In her autobiography she writes, "BARRY HUMPHRIES. Still my manager, but under solicitor's thumb. His contributions to our show getting smaller by the year.") And Edna's putdowns about his lack of talent only add to his legend and his mystery. In explaining Edna to the public, Humphries does what all dandies do: he obscures his depths and his roots. "If England is the Motherland and Germany is the Fatherland, Australia is certainly the Auntieland," he told his friend the actor-writer John Wells. "I had a lot of aunts, all very nice, but they were there, all the time. So I was pretty good at giving an impersonation, certainly, of a kind of synthesis of these women. And also of their obsession with domestic detail, seeing the whole world, really, through the venetian blind of the kitchen window: seeing everything in terms of household arrangements, cleanliness, all that stuff. These people who managed to live comfortably and happily in such a narrow world that they could get by without ever having read the Muirs' translations of Kafka, that they could be perfectly happy and well entertained without dipping into 'Cardinal Pirelli.' "

There were few books in the Humphries house. "My mother was a great student of *The Australian Women's Weekly*," Humphries says. The family's tidy and comfortable home was as free from dirt as it was from the infection of ideas. "There were just standard books," Humphries recalls. " 'The Family Doctor,' an encyclopedia bought from a travelling salesman. Very few novels. My uncle—my mother's brother-in-law—had been in France during the First World War. He had a lot of books and gave me some. My father bought me whatever books I wanted, although a copy of D. H. Lawrence was seized by my mother." Humphries also had two great-uncles who painted. "They did very large pictures of the River Nile at sunset and of lions in their lair," he says.

It was not only the deadly tedium

of the Melbourne suburbs that so powerfully affected Humphries but the silence inside his own house. “It was quiet. Only at my insistence was a gramophone obtained,” he says. “I started collecting records seriously as a boy.” Music partly answered Humphries’ “hankering for somewhere else.” He says, “In the early Melbourne days, sitting in Camberwell wondering what I was going to do when I grew up, I was mostly listening to English music: Vaughan Williams and Delius in particular, romantic ‘pastoral’ music.” The family’s brown Bakelite radio also abetted Humphries’ yearning for “moister climates,” by bringing him into contact with British music-hall comedians and the notion that people told jokes for a living. This discovery occurred when Humphries was about ten, and laughter seemed to hold out to him a power comparable to his fantasy of being a magician and making people disappear. Humphries says, “I wanted to exercise power over people. I wanted to control their access to me.” In a mock novel about “an androgynous and eldritch child” named Tid, Humphries wrote, in 1961, “Tid’s main thing was trying not to be seen. You can’t imagine how hard this job was. . . . He just wanted ladies and men to accept the fact that he wasn’t there.” At the end, Tid becomes king. Humphries wrote, “Tid hides in the world and is king of it.”

THE GULF

Along the Gulf, we bury the dead
above ground in little houses, marble
or slate, perhaps a winged Gabriel
on the roof, trumpet raised.
Strange to think of them still in our world,
just out of sight, changing slowly
in the same dusk in which we shop
or switch on the evening news, as though
we could turn to them and ask
what it’s like, ask what they remember.

Here, eight stories above the sea,
the fog has drifted in up to the balcony,
blotting out the beach, the pier,
the little houses of the dead, so thick
it seems you could walk on it.
Clank of a fisherman’s pail, voices,
a car door closing, exhalation
of water over sand. In the South, in exile
where I’ve made my home, in the middle
of my life, I meet my dead
by accident, a whisper, their cold
breath fogging my sight, *remember me:*

smell of chalk dust, a classroom
emptied in June, the voices outside
trailing off into their lives;
or Anna in a funnel of August sun,
my young mother walking me toward her,
humming of bees in the grape arbor.
What becomes of us, broken shells and sea glass,
something polished by tides? Above me,
the stars are scattered, blown like tea leaves
into patterns we name and recognize,
the Big Dipper, its cup full of space, that clean
emptiness toward which we drift.

—JAMES ULMER

• •

“IT’S true,” Dame Edna says, scanning the front rows. “There are such a lot of lovely young folk here to see me. The young *adore* me. And please, youngsters, remember everything you see tonight. Will you promise Edna? Please? Your grandchildren are probably going to want to know about this experience. They are. This could be your only interesting anecdote.”

Dame Edna sees herself as the world’s role model. She is, she says, into “M”s, including matrimony, motherhood, and monogamy. Dame Edna has always been true to Norm in her fashion. As she sang in “Why Do I Love Australia?”:

> Why do I love Australia?
> Why does it grab me so?
> Life was so sunny and informal
> When my husband Norm was normal
> And my career was in embryo.

Dame Edna treats her children with the same combination of sentimentality and neglect. “I think my famous softness really took a big leap forward when my first bubba came along,” Dame Edna writes in “My Gorgeous Life,” and she recalls returning to her roots in Moonee Ponds and going through the postures of parenthood while looking at the pencil marks of her children’s heights still on the doorframe. “My lovely hazel eyes prickled with tears as I looked around.”

Humphries himself is a much married man. In *Who’s Who* he does not acknowledge his first marriage—to a classical ballerina, Brenda Wright, in 1955, when he was twenty-one. He married, he told the press, “much too young,” and in 1959, after he was divorced, he married another dancer, Rosalind Tong, whom he’d met during the run of a children’s play he cowrote and starred in—“The Bunyip and the Satellite.” Humphries’ second marriage, which produced two daughters—Tessa, in 1963, and Emily, in 1965—lasted nearly twelve years and ended with Rosalind’s leaving a packed suitcase for Humphries at the stage door. Humphries told the Sydney *Daily Mirror* in 1982:

> I was enjoying all the razzle dazzle of success. After leaving the theatre at night, instead of going home, I’d find myself going to a pub, then on to a club or party. I got to the stage where I hardly bothered to look at my watch.
>
> I don’t reproach Rosalind at all for what she did. I reproach myself. We were together for nearly twelve years, and when it was over, I was deeply unhappy for a long time.

For a few years after his divorce from Rosalind, Humphries declared himself a bad matrimonial bet and swore off the institution. “For a long time I was an impossible person to live with," he told English *Vogue* in 1976. "I'm fine as far as work is concerned, but I'm bad at other things, like returning phone calls and making breakfast. The traditional wife has her uses—but I wouldn't want to live with anyone who wanted to be just a wife. Anyway, after unsuccessful relationships, one gets a bit tense, a bit wary."

But in 1975 Humphries met Diane Millstead, whose paintings he had admired in a Melbourne gallery, and in 1979 she became the third Mrs. Humphries. "Diane claims I used to be a terrible womanizer before I met her," Humphries said in the *Mirror*. "I prefer to say I was very, very fond of female company." The marriage produced two sons—Oscar, in 1981, and Rupert, in 1982—and its share of headlines. At the beginning of their marriage, Millstead referred to Humphries in the press as "the sex symbol of the Eighties," but when the marriage ended, in 1989, she was calling him "a champion mattress tester." In June, 1990, Humphries married Lizzie Spender, the actress-playwright daughter of Stephen Spender.

"Isn't it a spooky thought," Dame Edna says, pursuing the idea of family and children, "to think that one day in the twenty-first century your little grandbubbas will be huddled around your gnarled and knotted kneecaps? You'll be leaning on your Zimmer frame and they'll look up to you and they'll say, 'Oh, Nana, Nana, tell us again that lovely story of the night, that historic night at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane (now a supermarket) . . . tell us about the night you went to see Saint Edna.' "

Dame Edna scowls at the audience for laughing at the notion of her as a canonized model of nurturing self-sacrifice. "Please! Don't laugh. I've had a tipoff. I can't tell you who told me, but he's Polish, single, and lives in Italy. That's *all* I can say." But later, after her monologue has meandered through accounts of her "regular exploratories" and her Swiss financial advisers, Dame Edna returns to her latest claim for herself as a mother. "I'm an upmarket Mother Teresa. I am. I am. And Mother Teresa comes to see me, too. Every time she comes to London. She comes to London once a year, for the Harrods Sale. It's not—no, it's not for the merchandise. She just loves sleeping in the street. She *loves* it. She said to me, 'Edna, those Knightsbridge gutters have got the edge on Calcutta.' She came backstage with her little program, holding a little gladdy she'd caught. And I said, 'Did you enjoy it, Tess, tell me?' And she said, 'Edna, I came out of your show feeling another woman!' "

Dame Edna is spinning a yarn about a letter she has received from a woman in Shepherd's Bush who has been to one of her shows. "She said, 'I was the woman sitting in the first six rows that you chose that night . . . as you always do . . . choose a woman . . . to do the nude cartwheels onstage.' " Dame Edna paces the stage and looks down into the front rows. "And now the mood has completely changed, hasn't it? I don't know what you'd call it. Blind terror, I think, don't you? I think these yups want to be up with the paups, don't you? *I think they do.* But don't you be nervous. Please. Supposing I chose, for argument's sake, *YOU!* In the third row—as I almost certainly will. Hello? What is your name? You. Yes. Yes. What is your name?"

"Emma," says a middle-aged blonde, faintly.

"Hello, Emma," Dame Edna coos. "Have you done much nude-cartwheel work? Don't worry, Emma. We've found audiences prefer an amateur nude cartwheelist, they do! They have a way of falling over which is vulnerable and—well, strangely appealing. So don't be nervous, Emma. Don't scratch your eczema, Emma. Because you will not know that you're doing these cartwheels, Emma. Do you know why? You'll be in deep shock, Emma. You will. Because whenever we women are very, very frightened, our bodies do a funny thing. We secrete an enzyme at the same time. So you'll not only be in your birthday suit endeavoring to do cartwheels, and failing. But you'll be secreting an enzyme at the same time. I hope that's reassuring."

DAME EDNA began as a less strident voice from the back of the Union Theatre Repertory Company touring bus taking "Twelfth Night" on one-night stands through Victoria in 1955. It was Humphries' first year as a professional actor. He was twenty-one. Having dropped out of Melbourne University two years earlier, he had been earning his living by working at E.M.I. as, variously, a wholesale record salesman and a breaker of recently

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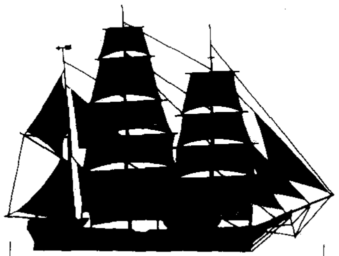

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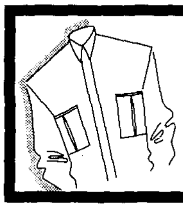

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obsolete 78s. "This latter chore," he says, of days he spent in a windowless room in an "inane frenzy," destroying piles of Mahler, Sibelius, Debussy, and the Ink Spots, "produced a more acute form of nervous exhaustion than I had experienced in my less compulsive Dadaist activities, though it bore an ironic resemblance to them." Humphries' Duke Orsino, on the other hand, was less than smashing. "He wasn't a swell leading man," says Zoe Caldwell, who played Viola. "Clearly, he didn't concentrate. He couldn't stay in a role. You thought, He can't possibly be an actor. But I knew he'd be something. He had such an extraordinary mind. As Orsino, his legs were too thin. When he came on, he got a laugh."

To entertain themselves from one country town to another, the cast sang songs, told tales, and recited verse. Humphries' party piece was Edna, who had "the unmistakable voice of the genteel Melbourne housewife," he says, and who was also "a flashback, really, to my earliest university days and late school days, when with a group of friends we formed a Melbourne Dada group . . . in which we attempted to ridicule the fellows who we felt were terribly stuffy—and, indeed, we were quite right in thinking so." Edna allowed Humphries to show off his gift for caricature and his desire to shine. "I found that I had a good falsetto voice, and I invented a character to go with it—a female character, because, you see, every night, when the curtain fell on 'Twelfth Night,' the local lady mayoress or the ladies' committee would invite this distinguished cast from the city of Melbourne to what was called a bun fight: cups of tea and wonderful cakes such as only Australians seem able to make—plates of lamingtons and iced vovos and butterfly cakes all stuck together with cream and cocoa. They used to give little speeches about how wonderful 'Twelfth Night' was. I had a knack of anticipating some of the ladies' speeches very, very well as my funny little character in the back of the bus."

Edna was encouraged by the company's resident writer-director, Ray Lawler, whose "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll," in the late fifties, was the first Australian play to win international fame and, along with Humphries' characters, sound a new theatrical note of Australian self-awareness. Humphries recalls, "When it came to be time for the annual revue, 'Return Fare,' which Lawler was directing, Ray said, 'Why don't you write a sketch for that character you did in the bus? What's she called?' I plucked a name out of the air: 'Edna,' I suggested, since I'd once had a kind of nanny called Edna, of whom I was very fond. I said, 'Her name is Edna, and she comes from Moonee Ponds.' I thought, I daren't say Camberwell, or my mother will think it's based on her. Indeed, Edna is more of a Camberwell character than she is a Moonee Ponds character. Moonee Ponds was a suburb of Melbourne I'd never been to, at the time. . . . 'Well, if I write a sketch for this character,' I said, 'who will play Edna? Will I do the voice from offstage?' Ray said, 'You do it yourself.' 'Can't Zoe be Edna?' I asked. He said, 'No, you be Edna. Do it like a pantomime dame.' "

On December 19, 1955, Edna Everage made her stage début. She wore no wig, no eyeglasses, and no makeup. "She had shortish brown hair, which was in fact my own longish hair combed down," Humphries says. "She wore a hat, a voluminous skirt, flat shoes, and sockettes, and carried a rather large handbag. She looked somewhat gauche and nervous and spoke in a high, genteel, less vigorous and confident way than she speaks now. She was, after all, someone who had merely strayed from the kitchen onto the stage." The sketch was called "Olympic Hostess"—a title as up to the minute as Edna's palaver. The 1956 Olympic Games were to be staged in Melbourne, and already there were advertisements in the local newspapers asking for fifteen thousand beds to put up the athletes. In the sketch, Edna attempted to offer her Moonee Ponds home for the Games, an opportunity not so much for hospitality as for house-pride. "There were not many traditional jokes in this piece," Humphries has written. "The real jokes turned out to be her lovely home itself."

> There's our bedroom, one—then there's the lounge and dining room. If you open the double doors—little Kenny—that's my youngest—always calls them the reindeer doors because of the sandblasted reindeers on the glass—if you open the double doors it's a lovely big room. We pushed back the Genoa velvet couch and rolled back the burgundy Axminster squares for Valmai's twenty-first, and the young people had the time of their lives.

"You could hear the whoosh of laughter," Humphries says of the audience's rapturous shock of recognition. Even the cast was surprised by the sketch's impact. "No one had really talked about Australian houses before," Humphries has said. "Since my father was a builder, and the creator of a number of substantial Melbourne houses, in jazz moderne with manganese bricks, or Spanish Mission with the barley-sugar columns and little grilled windows, I was interested in houses. I found that I'd discovered something I could write about, not by putting the telescope to my eyes and trying to write something in the manner of Coward or Alan Melville, but by just looking through the venetian blinds onto my own front lawn. So Edna was born. Edna Everage as in 'average,' husband Norm as in 'normal.' "

Until Edna's début, Humphries had been "the boy in the rep who was worst at learning his lines and was getting smaller and smaller parts." Edna's success made him the star of the revue. Humphries ended up getting an eighteen-month engagement in revue at the Phillip Street Theatre in Sydney. "I found, to my great pleasure," Humphries says, "that the 'Olympic Hostess' sketch was popular there and that Mrs. Everage was by no means unknown in New South Wales." But Humphries had no ambitions for the character. Having discovered her, he promptly put her in mothballs. Edna made her Sydney début in 1956, in "Mr. and Mrs.," but she didn't appear onstage in Melbourne again until 1958, when she was seen first in Peter O'Shaughnessy's "Lunch-Hour Theatre Revues" and later in the "Rock 'n Reel Revue."

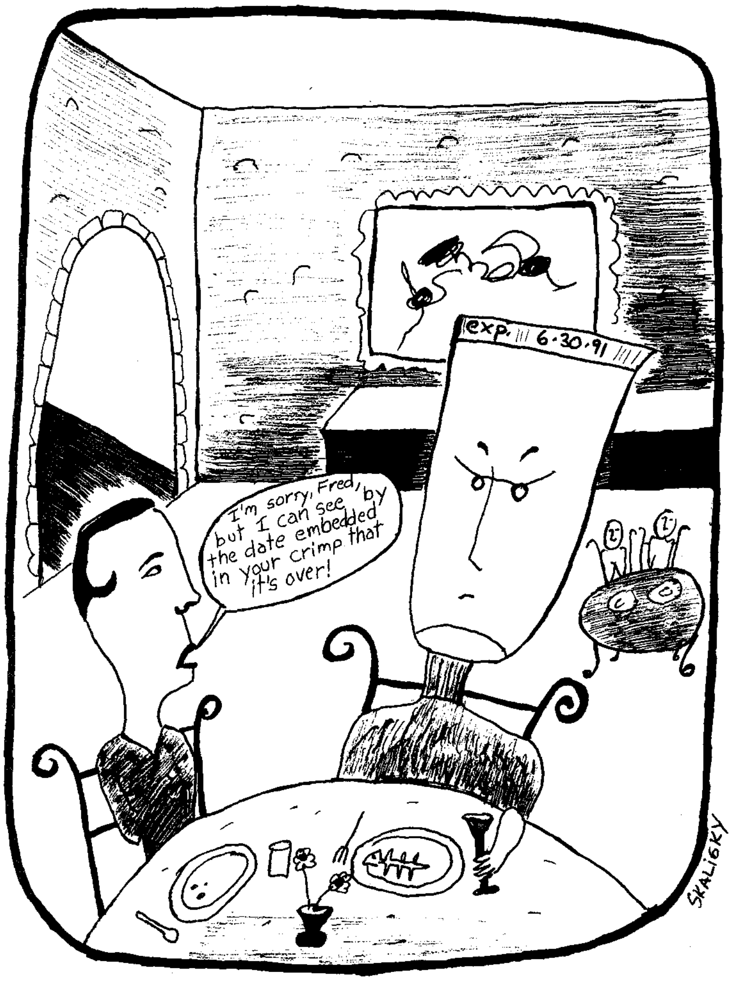
"In Australia, before me, most comic stereotypes were kind of rural people, hayseeds, hillbillies," Humphries says. "There seemed to be no Australian comedians who actually tried to reproduce *as accurately as possible*, without the use of jokes, or even funny names, something intrinsically funny in the way that *most* people really did live. In refrigerators. In appliances. In the problems of parking the car. It was just a sort of fresh interpretation of ordinary life. Whereas before, when you were identifying with Lucille Ball or Bob Hope or the Marx Brothers, you had to go through a very quick series of transpositions. First, you had to translate from the American into the English or Australian idiom, and *then* get the joke." In Edna's case, the joke was at the Australian front door.

Edna was the doyenne of philistine denial. She feared the penetration of anything: germs, ideas, certainly sex. "Although my childhood was in the midst of—at the very heart of—niceness and decency and cleanliness and comfort," Humphries has written, "I perceived the little dramas of Australian suburban life: the war against stains and creepy crawlies and the mysterious Outback; the knowledge that we didn't really live in Bournemouth or Wimbledon, but on the ghostly periphery of Asia with no traditions or even ghost stories to palliate our fear." Edna barricaded herself in the trivia of daily life. She gave her listeners detailed baking recipes. She lectured the audience on home hygiene: "A drop of disinfectant in your kiddy's schoolbag could save a lot of heartache. A Pine-O-Cleen rinse makes your rubbish bins safe to live with." She hymned the contents of her medicine chest: "Calamine lotion. Milk of magnesia. Laxettes. Aspros. Band-Aids (flesh-tint). Bicarbonate of soda. Golden eye ointment. Raleigh's Ready Relief . . . " Her fear of infection betrayed a mind without a thought—with just the echo of brand names and the rhythms of their advertising slogans.

For Humphries himself, there was no advertisement like self-advertisement. Edna gave Humphries the license to make a spectacle of himself. And he did. "Barry Humphries is, perhaps, the most gifted clown in Australia," said Humphries' bio in the 1958 program for the "Rock 'n Reel Revue." By 1959, Australian society had taken both the character and her creator to its heart, and that summer Humphries set off to test his talent in the more competitive arena of English theatre. Dame Edna, in her chapter about the Australian leave-taking in her autobiography, recalls that Mother Teresa subsequently told her that true happiness comes from renunciation. "I began my Life of Renunciation years ago," Dame Edna writes. "I decided to renounce Obscurity." It was a big roll of the dice for both Edna and her creator. Humphries' arrival in London was noted in one paragraph of the *Evening News* with the headline "A STAR HERE?" "That question mark haunted me for years," Humphries says.

"EXCUSE me," Dame Edna says, breaking off her monologue in "Back with a Vengeance!" to take the twenty-two hundred and forty-five paying customers sternly into her confidence. "*Paupers, stop leaning forward. I've told you a squillion times!* There was a tragedy here the other night. We've kept it out of the papers, but I have to tell you what it was. A pauper woman—a paupess, actually—plummeted . . . " Having invented a word and reinforced it by alliteration, Edna continues to dazzle the audience with her effortless juggling of pun, innuendo, and irony, which unobtrusively plants in the audience's imagination the notion of someone falling out of the balcony. "She was leaning forward—it's so steep up there—she was leaning forward to get a chockie off the lap in front of her. At least, that's what we *assume* she was doing. She was fumbling for a hard one, Emma, when she came out. She wrapped her chops around the back of a seat, the toughest hard one she's ever experienced. They had to put her in a plastic bag and take her away. I laughed. . . . I laughed compassionately. I did."

"A NUMBER of people prophesied success for me who saw me on my home ground, where I *knew* I was funny," Humphries says of his move to London. "There's nothing better than seeing a comic who thinks he's funny. If he's not entirely sure that what he's saying is amusing, or if his anxiety gets the better of him, he's not doing himself justice." And anxiety was the mood of Humphries' life as he struggled to get a theatrical foothold in London. "Barry was absolutely broke," says his compatriot Ian Donaldson, a professor of English Literature and also an Old Melburnian, who hung out during the early, insecure years in the louche atmosphere of Humphries' Notting Hill basement apartment, with other artistic Aussie expats, like the painters Arthur Boyd, Sidney Nolan, and Francis Limburner. In order to audition by day, Humphries took a job in an ice-cream factory by night. "I didn't work there very long, but it was my only experience of factory


exp. 6·30·91
I'm sorry, Fred, but I can see by the date embedded in your crimp that it's over!
SKALISKY

Expiration Date

work," he says. "It was a hellish experience, and sort of Dadaist as well. At first, I was working on a conveyor belt. It was Chaplinesque. Because of my maladroitness, I was put with the morons. I wasn't *allowed* to work on the conveyor belt, because I kept dropping the ice creams. I was put in a room where a group of us sat around an enormous plastic drum throwing damaged ice creams into it. I felt I smelled rather of raspberry ripple when I went to auditions."

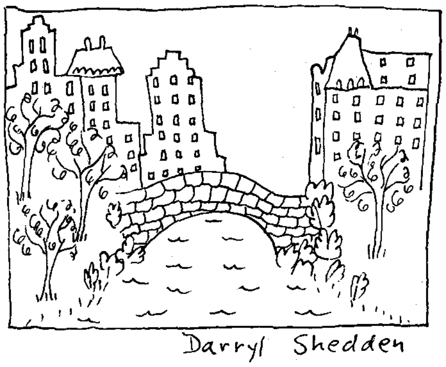
Five months after arriving in England, in June, 1959, Humphries landed a small part. He played the madhouse keeper in "The Demon Barber," a musical about Sweeney Todd, at the Lyric, Hammersmith—far from the West End. Humphries' own characters fared less well. His desiccated Melbourne ghost, Sandy Stone, made a brief appearance on British television upon his arrival. "I don't think anyone made anything of it at all," Humphries says. Edna seemed to arouse even less interest. If his prospects appeared to be dim, his intellectual life took on a new amperage. He seized his London days with manic energy. His appetite for England and all things English filled his unemployed hours. "He was extraordinary," Donaldson says. "He fitted in immediately. He knew London. He knew about various writers and artists who we thought were dead. He said they were living in basements and attics. He knew the right pubs to drink in, the right people to talk to. He established this extraordinary network—still not getting employment but becoming known and being seen as someone of extraordinary knowledge who was also entertaining."

"In London, it was a question of finding a voice that people could actually hear and wish to listen to," Humphries says. London seemed like the Big Table at which he was not allowed to sit. "People are talking and you're outside" is how he characterizes the feeling. "You sort of tune in. You think, I want to come in on this, but I have to wait until the moment."

Humphries goes on, "I've suddenly discovered that England is really a province of Australia. And so I needn't have been frightened all those years ago. If I'd gone straight in . . . But I wasn't ready." Although he soon got work in the West End, appearing as Sowerberry in Lionel Bart's "Oliver!" (1960) and, later, in his "Maggie May" (1964), he did not get much satisfaction. "I think Barry's mood in London when I met him was bad," says Peter Cook, who was then at the height of his celebrity both as an entertainer in "Beyond the Fringe" and as an impresario of outrageousness, who owned substantial shares in the satirical magazine *Private Eye* and was the proprietor of the Soho comedy club The Establishment. "I feel sure that he was certain he was very talented. I don't think he liked being in a minor part in 'Oliver!' Why it took Barry so long to become established—and, indeed, adored—over here, I don't quite know. I think in those early years, he was feeling a bit embittered." Cook, who was a fan of some records Humphries had made—especially those featuring Sandy Stone—but who had never seen him perform, generously threw Humphries a lifeline, asking him to do a three-week season at The Establishment in 1963, for a hundred pounds a week. "Big money," Humphries recalls of his Establishment gig, in which Sandy Stone and a timid Edna made their theatrical débuts in England. "*Very* big money. As soon as I got there, though, I felt a little uneasy. The shape of the room was long and narrow. The audience wasn't close to me, and it wasn't an experienced cabaret audience, either. The huge success of satire and 'That Was the Week That Was' on TV had led them to expect a certain kind of humor—very topical and often very witty and very irreverent about British institutions. My kind of rambling regional monologues, which depended for their effect not on jokes or on impersonations of political figures, were really unsuitable for that kind of place. They wanted Harold Macmillan. They didn't want Glen Iris, Melbourne."

In the annals of The Establishment, according to Peter Cook, no turn went down worse. "The stoniest of stony silences," Cook says. "*Nobody* found Barry remotely amusing. There were about three or four people who thought, This is very, very funny. Mainly, John Betjeman, John Osborne, and me. I felt ashamed of my fellow-Londoners for not appreciating him." In "My Gorgeous Life" Dame Edna turns this punishing memory of humiliation into hilarity by blaming her actor-manager, Humphries, for the disaster. He, she claims, went on *before* her, and emptied the room. "I had a bit of a weep afterwards," Dame Edna writes. "Barry had gone home in a huff, the worse for a few sherries I'm afraid. . . . This was the lowest ebb in my career, but I have described it honestly and courageously. I was hurt at the time and my confidence was badly shaken, but I decided to have a few tough new clauses written into my contract with Mr H. I also vowed that if I ever found success outside my native land, I would remember this incident."

And Dame Edna has remembered it. As the title of the present show admits, Dame Edna embraces her celebrity with a vengeance. And, like Humphries, Edna deals with her corrosive sense of envy by becoming the envied. She revels in her distinction in the same way and for the same reason that all the programs of Humphries' twelve one-man shows contain encomiums of his genius and photographs of him with the cultural icons of his era. "Barry Humphries is the first Australian Satirist, he is also one of the funniest men in the World, if you don't think so, then it's your loss," Spike Milligan wrote for Humphries' second one-man show, "Excuse I" (1964), adding, under his name, "(being of sound mind)." On the same page is a photograph of the young Humphries with another licensed trickster, Salvador Dalí. Humphries' insistence on his comic and intellectual pedigree belies his long, sometimes hurtful struggle to have it validated.



Darryl Shedden

"Barry first came to my attention at The Establishment," says the New Zealand-born cartoonist Nicholas Garland, who collaborated with Humphries on the sixties cult cartoon "The Adventures of Barry McKenzie," which ended up as two feature films. "The act was a failure, but we were all *enormously impressed* by Barry. We all began talking to each other in this preposterous parody of Australian. He instantly became somebody you rated. He was immediately subsumed into our culture, into our vocabulary, into the way we spoke. But it was a struggle for Barry. The English have plenty of eccentrics, plenty of people pretending to be Oscar Wilde and wearing their hair long. It took a while for Barry to get the measure of this." With a leg up from Peter Cook, Humphries was soon playing with the big boys. He crashed the cliquish Shrewsbury set that ran *Private Eye*, appearing in the magazine's columns both in the Barry McKenzie cartoon and as its astrologer, Madame Barry. He was cutting comedy tracks like "Old Pacific Sea," "Chunder Down Under," and "The Earl's Court Blues." He was doing character work for Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, in Stratford East, as well as appearing in the West End. (He would make seventeen appearances in the West End in the subsequent decade, including a leading role in "The Bed-Sitting Room," with Spike Milligan; a memorable Long John Silver—"I'm going to take a peep round the poop"—in a Christmas production of "Treasure Island" at the Mermaid Theatre; and Fagin in a revival of "Oliver!") He was also tapped to join BBC-TV's "The Late Show" wits in 1964-65. Humphries was promising but not established. His frustration was beginning to show. He was on the page, on the stage, on records, on TV, and on the bottle.

"I remember Barry at a Boxing Day party doing something that I'd never witnessed before," says Peter Cook, who enjoyed bending an elbow with Humphries. "I think you have to reach another level of drunkenness to achieve it. I did the normal thing of falling down drunk, but Barry upstaged me by falling upstairs. I don't know how he did it." Between the mid-sixties and the early seventies, when he swore off the sauce, Humphries drank so heavily he nearly died from it. By the power of his charm and his humor, he managed to conceal much of his drunken desperation. "I remember sitting in a taxi with a Harrods bag on my lap that had a half bottle of whisky in it and looking at the queue of heroin addicts outside Boots the Chemists in Piccadilly Circus with contempt," he is quoted as saying in a recent biography by Peter Coleman, of the time he now characterizes as "when I was ill and mad." "They were addicts and I was something else. I was, if you like, a genius out of luck. I was a sensitive person. I just drank alcohol like all the best people, like Dylan Thomas, like Scott Fitzgerald, like Malcolm Lowry, like John Barrymore, like Tony Hancock. I belonged to the aristocracy of self-destruction."

"THERE is a woman here tonight," Dame Edna says, peering over the footlights. "A woman who intrigues me. *You!* In the middle of the second row, with a little thoughtful look on your face. Hello, darling. Did you see me peeping at you?"

"Yes," says a thin voice from Row B.

"I saw you peeping at me, too. You'd be a foolish woman if you weren't, wouldn't you? Swivelling your head like the kiddie in 'The Exorcist.' What's your name?"

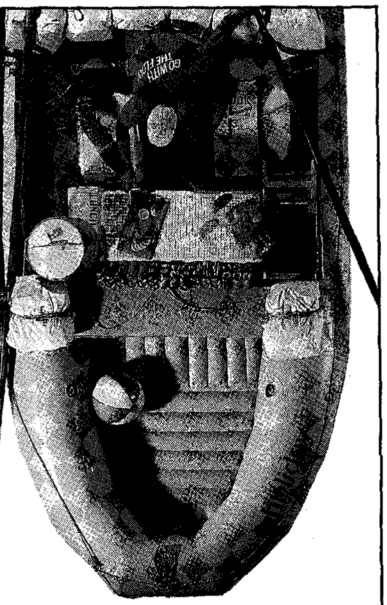
She's Margaret from Hornchurch.

"I don't know Hornchurch very well, but there are some lovely homes down that way, aren't there? Do you live near any of them, do you? Margaret? What type of a home have you?"

"A detached home."

"Oh, lovely," Dame Edna says. "Hear that, paupers? A detached home. It's a foreign language to them, Margaret. Have you made it nice inside? I . . . think . . . you . . . have, Margaret. I think you have. You can redecorate, can't you, Margaret, quite inexpensively. A little bit of emulsion. A little bit of paint. To make a beautiful home, I think that's serious money, as the yuppies would say. And yet . . . you've saved on clothes, haven't you, Margaret?"

Dame Edna likes to disconcert her audience. In previous shows, she has asked for, and received, shoes from the audience for her inspection. She has coaxed four people onto the stage to cook a barbecue and then left the paying customers alone in front of two thousand people while, with consummate daring, she made her exit for a costume change. She has insisted that her audience sit still for a Polaroid picture to remember it by. "You could feel the audience posing," Ian Davidson says, recalling the preposterousness of someone trying to photograph an en-



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tire audience. "A little picture would come out, and Edna would say, 'It's not very good of *you.*'" Dame Edna has also pulled a flashlight from her purse and trained it on the critics, trying to make them identify themselves—a job made easier by a sign saying "CRITIC" which dropped down over their assigned seats.

"What color carpet?" Dame Edna is asking Maud from Chingford. "Beige? Good heavens, she's been to the same remnant sale as you, Margaret. Any pictures on the wall? No pictures. No little pictures on the bedroom wall? Sounds delightful. And you're delightful, Maud. (You're going to adore this woman when she's onstage in a minute.) Maud has gone beige now! Not yet, darling, no, but *soon!* So soon, that if I were you I'd start tensing up now."

Dame Edna is maneuvering the audience to join her onstage as extras in her epic. "Did you ever see my wonderful show 'The Dame Edna Experience'?" she says. "Emma, did you see it? It was marvellous, wasn't it, Emma? (Emma's getting a bit more animated by the minute there.) Did you see it at all, my TV series? Did you, Maud? Lovely. I tell you what I started doing. I was just talking to friends like Charlton Heston, Larry Hagman. And then it proved too popular. They said they wanted me to do another series this year. I said *I will.* But I said I want *real people.* I said this time actually I want nonentities. I want . . . I want women like you, Maud, as a matter of fact. Whose chances of becoming a celebrity are—ha, ha—let's face it, darling, *nil.*"

EDNA was damed spontaneously, on camera, by the Socialist Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. Happy to hitch his then popular public image to Edna's rising star, Whitlam made a guest appearance in the final scene of "Barry McKenzie Holds His Own" (1974), the second successful film collaboration of Humphries and the director Bruce Beresford. "Did you know the Prime Minister and I once slept together?" Edna says to her nephew Barry McKenzie as they approach Sydney Airport and a hero's welcome at the end of their adventures in Central Europe. "It was at the Opera House, during the second act of 'War and Peace.'" The joke was cribbed from Ronald Firbank's play "The Princess Zoubaroff," but the finale was wholly original, a surprise even to Humphries. Edna came out of the plane and fell into the Prime Minister's arms, and Whitlam said, "*Dame* Edna. Arise, Dame Edna." Thereafter, she was Dame Edna. "In a sense, Edna takes directions from herself, not me," Humphries says. "If the character seems to be developing that way, I generally go with it. I don't allow the puritan conscience to arise in me and say, 'What is she doing being a famous person when she should be back in Melbourne telling them what's wrong with their bathroom fittings?'"

Dame Edna declared herself a superstar. It was a smart career move. The mutation in Edna's character occurred in the mid-seventies, by which time the West had become accustomed to parody display and celebrity rule. Of Edna's evolution into superstar, which gave her a universal focus and turned her quickly into a piece of cross-cultural folklore, Humphries says, "I noticed that Barbra Streisand was starting to make pronouncements on things. They were views on poetry and art. These people who were traditionally philistine were not meant to excel in intellectual pursuits or matters of alternative religions. So Edna caught the wave that her countrywoman Germaine Greer had helped to generate, and started doing some fancy surfing. It was originally a conscious parody of what these other people were saying. For instance, Streisand came out and said that her favorite picture was Edvard Munch's 'The Scream.' That played right into Edna's hands. She said it was her favorite picture, too, and she'd had it made into dinner mats. Also, when these stars started to talk about being 'very private people,' Edna leaped on that. It was only people who were *fiends* for publicity who ever said it. As she became more famous, she adopted the postures of modesty. So she became a kind of cipher and also a megaphone for the styles and affectations of the period, which changed very rapidly. You had to be very up-to-date."

In the program, Edna identifies herself as Housewife, Megastar, Investigative Journalist, Social Anthropologist, Children's Book Illustrator, Film Script Assessor, Diseuse, Swami, Monstre Sacré, Polymath, and Hard-nosed Literary Agent, specializing in radical women's issues. (Her bio photograph shows Dame Edna posed with the book "Sexual Harassment: A Pictorial History.") "More and more, I find with Edna that you can throw anything into the cauldron, and somehow it's just Edna's new shape," Humphries says. "That's how she's developing today."

"Bring on my talk-show hostesses, please," Dame Edna says, suddenly Lady Bountiful dishing out compliments to the show's four chorus girls, the Lesettes, and promises of BMWs and world trips to the audience.

This is the moment that the audience has feared and been thrilling for, the moment in which Humphries, in a sense, recapitulates in the audience his childhood terror of being wiped out. Such is the power of Humphries' control of an audience and Dame Edna's tyrannical charisma that, no matter how far away they sit, all members of the audience feel a quiver of terror that Dame Edna will choose *them.* Humphries says, "I've taken to holding out these bribes—'Now, my next big major prize-winner is . . .'—if there looks to be a difficult, recalcitrant member of the audience. I prefer the doubtful ones."

"So," Dame Edna says, "without any further ado . . . I feel the excitement mounting. . . . And so I would like to invite to your ovation a very special person that I noticed almost as soon as I stepped on the stage tonight. Let's hear it for Maud from Chingford."

With the entire auditorium straining to see her, and the boom of some two thousand deeply relieved people clapping at the sound of her name, Maud is finally coaxed out of her seat and up the stairs at the side of the stage into Dame Edna's waiting arms. "Hello, darling. Hello, Maud. How nice to see you," Dame Edna says, giving her a big hug and a big smile. "You delightful woman. You are absolutely delightful. And what lovely, lovely happiness you radiate, too. You do. Hairdresser's this morning, Maud?"

"No," says Maud.

"I didn't think so for a moment. However, never mind." In the moment between the uplift of Edna's compliment and the sting of her putdown, Humphries winks at Maud to disown the laugh and relax her fear.

"Barry's got the audience so well drilled that they all laugh at the same time," Ian Davidson says. "They're a solid mass. And they all turn to their partners to seek confirmation. You can see this. I've sat in the box and watched the audience. Between the moment of laughter and when they turn for corroboration, there is a moment of audience blindness. The audience isn't looking at the stage. You can do things in that moment. Barry usually smiles and winks at his victim."

Maud is ushered, laughing, offstage to be dolled up for the talk show. Dame Edna turns back to her audience. "And now my Hornchurch pilgrim, MARGARET! Here she is!"

But Margaret isn't budging.

"Come on, Margaret. Come on. Wait a minute. What's the matter, Margaret, darling?"

"I would prefer not to come," says Margaret.

"What? Mmn."

"I would prefer not to come."

"No?" says Dame Edna. "But the audience would love you to come. And to be branded a spoilsport would be horrible, Margaret. Wouldn't it be ghastly? Leaving the theatre, people spitting on you. I mean . . . I think the little bank manager next to you is trying to discourage you, isn't he, darling? Is he? You're the first woman who's ever rejected my offer, Margaret. Isn't that sad? I hope it doesn't bring you *terrible luck* for the rest of your life. What is Margaret's seat number? Ah, yes, yes. You would have—you would have won the BMW. Ha, ha. I'm so sorry. Never mind. Some people are killjoys, aren't they? It's a lovely opportunity to meet an understudy. A woman who we've spoken to before and she's longing to come up and join me. And what an ovation she'll get when she does. It's the lovely EMMA!"

Emma, tonight's erstwhile nude cartwheelist, gets a big hand and is greeted by Edna with fulsome praise for her "little outfit." Says Dame Edna, "I think you've paid me a great compliment coming straight from work to my show."

The audience creases up. Humphries gives Emma the wink and rounds on the uproarious crowd. "*Please! Don't be so rude! Have your manners just flown out the window?*" To which the answer, happily, is yes.

"Now let's hear it for Dame Edna's seminal, pivotal, mold-breaking, and revolutionary TALK SHOW!"

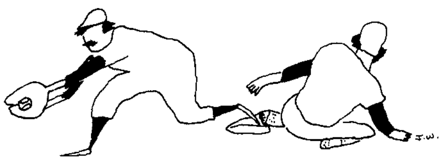
IN conventional talk shows, the host listens while the guests talk, but with Dame Edna, who assumes that the guests are there for her amusement, the formula is reversed. They have to listen hard while *she* talks. Rarely is she bested. Dame Edna once probed former Prime Minister Ted Heath about his homes and the names of his Spanish staff. "I have a cleaning lady called Purificación," said Dame Edna. "And I have another Spanish helper, called Contracepción."

Said Mr. Heath, sharpish, "How do you get the two to work together?"

TV viewers had the unusual sight of Dame Edna laughing out loud at repartee that beat even her to the draw.

The show tries to exploit Dame Edna's confusion of reality and the credulity of the viewing public. "Most upmarket London penthouses have very highly trained Filipino staff," Dame Edna said in one show. "Mine is no exception. Except the little woman who smilingly Vims my vanitary unit and is my next guest. She's the former First Lady of all Filipinos. Yes. IMELDA MARCOS!"

"Imelda Marcos" entered to studio-audience applause, took a bow, and began walking toward Edna. "She's wearing my shoes!" Dame Edna said in horror, blowing a whistle she had taken from her purse. A barking mastiff bounded across the set and chased the stand-in offstage. In Dame Edna's first series of shows, "Charlton Heston" appeared in a wheelchair at the top of the set's steep and dangerous staircase. "It's just a bad sprain," he said. Dame Edna sent a nurse to help him. "Heston" and the nurse proceeded to tumble down the stairs. So real did the stunt look that Humphries' other guests, who could see "Heston" only on the monitors, were terror-stricken. The real Heston subsequently received thousands of get-well letters until he appeared on the show the following week in one handsome piece. Other public figures have met similar disasters. "Kurt Waldheim" appeared at the top of Dame Edna's stairway only to be dropped through a trapdoor. And "the Duchess of Kent," on her entrance, was snared in a booby trap and swung from her heels as Dame Edna signalled for a station break.



Dame Edna gives her non-celebrity guests a much gentler ride. Dressed as a nun, an Edna look-alike, a punk rocker, and a showgirl, the guests cram onto Dame Edna's postmodern sofa like so many dummies on a ventriloquist's knee. Dame Edna gets them to nod and respond while she pretends to ask for some collective wisdom about her wayward daughter, Valmai. "She shoplifts now, she does," Dame Edna says, keeping her guests captive with the cold intensity of her eye contact. "She goes into some of those Bond Street shops. She steals things. Puts them in her panty hose. Particularly frozen chickens when she's in a supermarket. Of course, the store detectives can smell those barbecued chickens when she goes out. Because she's a human microwave. She thinks she's an art collector. She thinks she's Peggy Guggenheim. That name ring a bell? She collects primitive art. New Guinea sculpture. Do you know much about New Guinea sculpture, Maud?"

"No," says Maud, running the gamut of her dialogue for the evening.

"You're missing nothing, darling. It is grotesque. It's mostly wooden willies."

And, with the notion of penises firmly planted in the audience's mind, it's a quick segue to the Gladdydämmerung that has been Edna's traditional spectacle of mayhem since the mid-sixties. "There's nothing more holy," Dame Edna said in "An Evening's Intercourse," "than massed gladioli." And, from the audience's delight, so it would seem. "It's gladdy time," says Dame Edna, frog-marching her accomplices downstage to the footlights. "There's some glads I want you to throw one at a time *gently* into the audience. Don't forget to let go. The Flinging Nun. It's gladdy time, a very beautiful moment in my famous show. Gladdy time. I mean, what other show . . . Could you imagine Barry Manilow doing this? Or Stevie Wonder?" Dame Edna throws a gladdy over her shoulder. "*Not in a million years! Not in a million years!*"

Dame Edna propels each gladdy

higher, until the audience is watching gladioli fly up to boxes three tiers high.

"What about me, Dame Edna?" calls a woman from a fourth-tier box.

There's a drumroll. Dame Edna backhands the gladdy up to her. It falls short of its target. Another drumroll. Another try. The gladdy arches up past the follow spot. The woman reaches for it, and, with an ear-piercing scream, topples out of the box.

People beneath her shriek and scatter as she holds on and clambers up.

"Has anyone got a blanket?" Dame Edna shouts, and then she passes down a blanket from the stage. There is a moment of pandemonium. Panicked theatregoers are cowering by the exit doors. Four stalwart members of the audience hold the gray blanket beneath the woman, bracing themselves to catch her.

"Heaven be praised! There was a rope ladder in that box," Dame Edna says. "Oh, wouldn't it be ghastly if that happened every night!"

Harriet Bowdler, the stage manager, turns to me. "He enjoyed it. They look silly."

"Up, up, up! Hold your gladdy by the end of the stem for maximum gladdy thrust. And when I give the word—there we are, darling—up, up. What a beautiful sight!"

The audience sings "The Gladdy Song" with Dame Edna, and, at her command, stands and trembles the gladdies. The evening is almost over, but not before the proper benedictions and the absolution of applause. The guests are sent back to their seats with appropriate gifts: Camembert, Nivea cream, Steradent, a jar of Vaseline, a pair of Norm's Y-fronts, along with flowers and bottles of champagne. Before Edna's Assumption, there remains the blessing of her disciples. Maud, who is the last to leave the stage, is asked to bow her head. "Isn't it pathetic that this is the highlight of her life?" Dame Edna confides to the audience. And then she waves a gladiolus over Maud's head and recites:

> Lucky possum that you are,
> You are now a mini-star.
> A big fish in a tiny pond,
> Thanks to my magic wand.
> Timid once, now you are bolder
> Since Edna's gladdy
> Touched your shoulder.
> Go forth now, be kind and true,
> Like Dame Edna was to you.

Soon dry ice is filling the stage with smoke, and Dame Edna's apotheosis is in its full magnificent swing. She has saved the most spectacular stage picture for last as she rises on the hydraulic lift high above the audience, singing about her shyness. No one in the audience wants Dame Edna shy. Everyone wants her as loud and vulgar and daring as she always is. Everyone wants her never at a loss, but filling life with the articulate energy of great clowning:

> Yet, I must confess that I've felt
> slightly better since
> You've helped me sublimate my grief-
> stricken reticence.
> So . . . now . . . gooooodbye.
> I've got my act together and my head
> held high,
> So high.
> I'm a merry widow with a roving eye,
> Yet I get so terribly shy
> When the time finally comes for me to
> say
> *Was it good for you, too, possums?*
> And gooooodbye. . . . Good night.
> Darlings.

The cherrypicker deposits Dame Edna back onstage, and the din of applause and bravos continues over her bows. But she can't sit still for an audience even in its adulation. Dame Edna is twisting to a samba beat, blowing a carnival whistle, waving to her paupers. Her need for attention is no smaller than the audience's need for joy. Dame Edna doesn't want to leave the stage, and the audience doesn't want her to leave it. Even when the curtain falls, Dame Edna is still a presence. A spotlight lingers on her hand, which plays near the floor in front of the curtain. Behind the curtain, Dame Edna is on her stomach, gesturing into the noisy void. She begins by giving the audience a wave—"almost a caress," says Humphries—and ends by almost giving it the finger.

Outside, after the show, people linger under the dark-blue columns of the Drury Lane's portico. Maud from Chingford is exiting with her armful of gladioli. A young man within earshot says, "There's Maud. There's the star of the show."

She nods in his direction and walks slowly down the marble steps into the chill of the London night.

—JOHN LAHR

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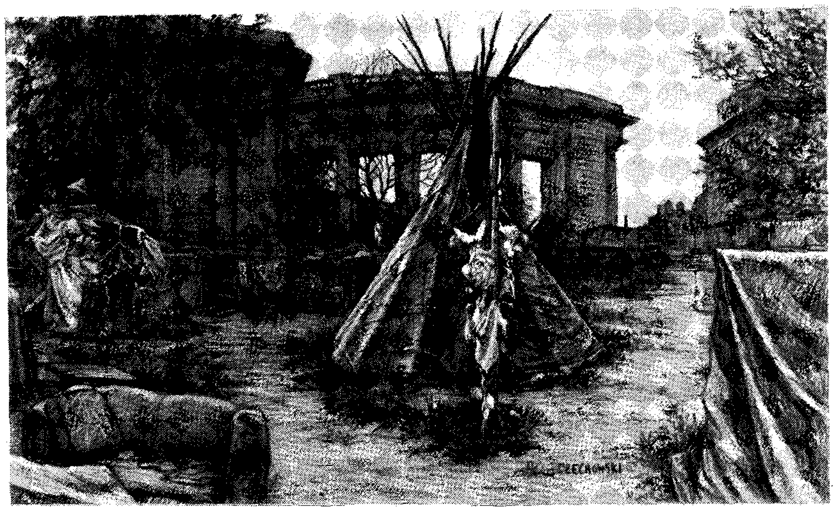


ON a dusty hummock adjoining the Canal Street end of the Manhattan Bridge stands a makeshift community that in materials, construction, and basic layout bears a resemblance to the great shantytowns of Manila and Rio de Janeiro. For the last six months, I have been making periodic visits to this place in an attempt to find out who lives there, and how and why. Shanty living is a phenomenon that is creeping up on New Yorkers much as homelessness did in the early nineteen-eighties. Two years ago, there was a flurry of stories in the local press about an encampment of tents and lean-tos in Tompkins Square Park and the response of the police and residents in the surrounding part of the East Village. But it was generally assumed that the Tompkins Square saga said more about the political and cultural peculiarities of a neighborhood with a colorful history of class conflicts than about housing trends in the city as a whole. Over the past year or so, several smaller settlements have come to public notice after being deemed unsafe. The reopening of a long-abandoned railroad tunnel in Riverside Park brought brief renown to a tribe of what the tabloids labelled "mole people." A steel trestle supporting the West Side Highway near Fifty-eighth Street warped in the heat of a fire resulting from an act of arson in one of the illegal residences below. Most recently, at Seventy-second Street and the highway, a barricaded approach ramp containing another cluster of impromptu dwellings was found to be so corroded that it will have to be torn down. In these and other attention-getting cases, however, shantytowns have entered the news only as the city was preparing to evacuate them. Meanwhile, other such colonies have been forming, growing, and taking on an eerie permanence, largely without benefit of news coverage.

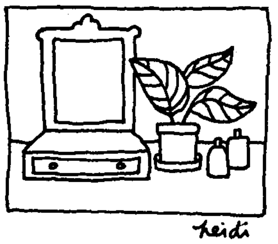
The last time that significant numbers of New Yorkers lived in this fashion was in the early nineteen-thirties, when the city was dotted with what were known as Hoovervilles. In the movie "My Man Godfrey," Carole Lombard plucks William Powell out of a vast Hooverville situated, fancifully, along the East River, near Sutton Place. One of the biggest of the real Hoovervilles—a community of approximately six hundred people, in which at least one baby was born in the winter of 1933—sprawled across an abandoned dump (now the Red Hook Recreational Area) on the Brooklyn waterfront. Another, consisting of some two hundred structures, was in Central Park, behind the Metropolitan Museum, on what is now the Great Lawn and was then the dried-out bed of an old reservoir. At night, some of the more enterprising residents went off to the Park's bird sanctuary to hunt for dinner. Americans saw the Hoovervilles as a frightening manifestation of an acknowledged economic calamity—the Depression; today, the nation is said to be emerging from the throes of a recession, but in the complex arithmetic underlying that assessment the number of people living in the streets, parks, and transportation facilities of the nation's cities is a statistic of no significance. The Hoovervilles were pretty much gone by the mid-thirties; it is far from clear that their modern equivalents (which have yet to be called Bushvilles, or given any other nickname suggesting a sense of national shame) will pass from the scene so quickly, for they seem to exist in a sort of fourth dimension of the economy, where waves of recession and prosperity are hardly felt.

BY the standards of Manila, Rio, or even Tompkins Square before it was cleared for a third, well-publicized time at the beginning of June, the Hill—as the settlement alongside the Manhattan Bridge is known to its residents and neighbors—is small: only about twenty people living in fifteen structures. Of all the city's current shantytowns, however, this one may be the most permanent-looking. A majority of the huts are made of wood, and most have locks. Some have been there for as long as four or five years. If such places advertised in the *Times*, the Hill would be in a position to offer easily affordable condominium homes in the heart of lower Manhattan.

Until last Thanksgiving, it was possible for someone speeding off the bridge to ignore the fact of human habitation there. At a casual glance, the Hill looked like countless other trash-laden "waste spaces," as they have been called, that adjoin the city's bridges and highways. Thanksgiving was when an Indian tepee, fashioned of United States Government mailbags, appeared on the site, instantly transforming it into one of the more arresting pieces of skyline in New York. Since the tepee's arrival, the Hill has become a minor tourist attraction. People who come upon it for the first time—many of them pedestrians making the downtown circuit of Little Italy, Chinatown, and Wall Street—are astonished to find such a community in such surroundings, and those with cameras tend to whip them out and click away, usually from a position of concealment behind a parked car or a phone booth. From a well-chosen angle, it is possible to capture the tepee and the other dwellings against a background that includes the twin towers of the World Trade Center and an Anchor Savings Bank billboard promoting, in giant pseudo-Chinese letters, the "Year of the Loan."

The Hill is not a place that welcomes unauthorized visitors. Strangers who set foot there can expect to be questioned, and if they have anything to do with the journalism business it may not matter what else they have to say—not, at any rate, if they want to accomplish anything in a hurry. "I can't get in the *Daily News* building, so you can't get in here," one resident told a *News* reporter who showed up recently. In my case, the result of a series of visits is a fragmentary picture, based on the testimony of a minority of the people living there about the things they cared to talk about.

One lesson that emerged quickly is that the word "homeless" blurs over some profound distinctions. The inhabitants of the Hill are people who insist on a degree of autonomy and anonymity not to be found in a city shelter, but they have also rejected the isolation and uncertainty of life on the street. Like other such settlements, the Hill "contrasts starkly with the received and still prevalent image of homeless individuals as 'disaffiliated,'" to quote from a recent study by a team of ethnographers working under Kim Hopper, of the Nathan Kline Institute for Psychiatric Research. Most of the people living on the Hill have been through other phases of what the world calls homelessness, and for them shanty living represents the discovery of a better alternative. Ace, a large man whose soft-spoken demeanor is difficult to square with the long history of violent altercations written across the planes of his face, has tried out virtually every form of overnight accommodation available to a New Yorker lacking conventional housing. A few years ago, he was living in a single-room-occupancy hotel and working as a truck driver for a plumbing-supply company. Ace is black, and everyone else associated with the company was Chinese—a fact that may or may not have contributed to a running dispute with the owner's son, which led to the loss of Ace's job and, in short order, the loss of his hotel room.



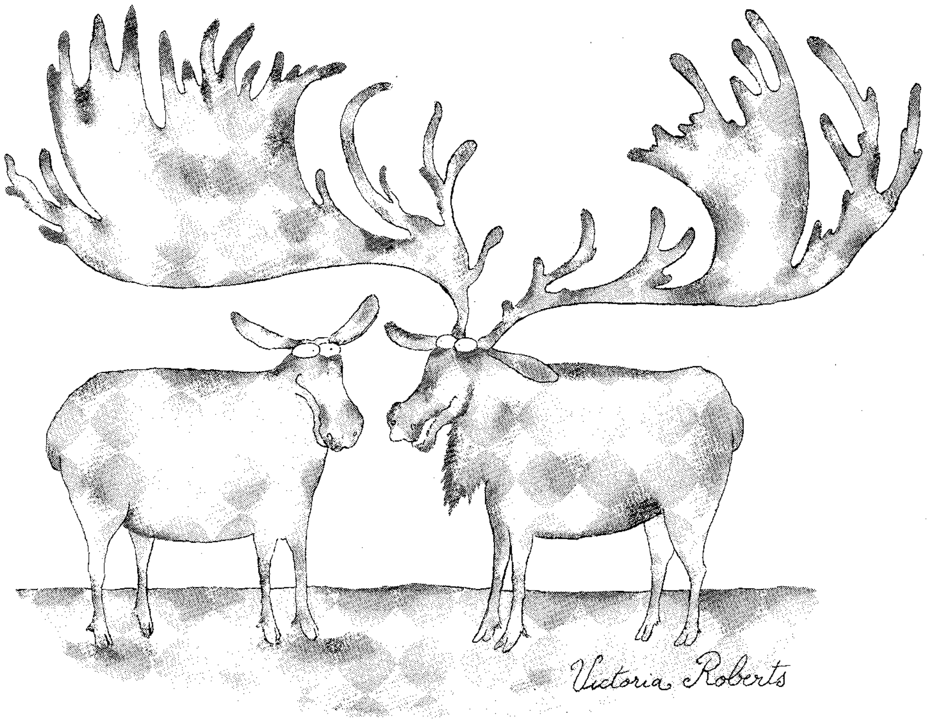
For a time, he lived in a vacant building at Ludlow and Stanton Streets—an arrangement that had the landlord's blessing, according to Ace, because he and his fellow-squatters took good care of the place and protected it from others, who might not have. Even after renovations began, the squatters stayed on. The workers would give advance warning whenever they were about to start gutting a new floor, and the squatters would pack their things and move up one flight. After the top floor became unavailable, they moved out. Ace's next extended place of residence was an abandoned entrance to the Delancey Street subway station. To enter this space, which had been converted into a storage room for old turnstiles, you climbed a stairway from the platform and forced your way around a wire-mesh gate. Here, too, landlord-tenant relations were reasonably harmonious (the subway maintenance staff often left a rest room open for the settlement's use), until the scene attracted an undesirable element of heavy drug users, whose unsanitary habits generated more passenger complaints than the Transit Authority could ignore. "People got out of hand, and the police ran us out" is how Ace sums it up.

Shortly before their eviction, an employee of the city's Human Resources Administration stopped by to make a pitch for the shelters—an appeal that remains fixed in Ace's memory because that very night, he says, a young man was murdered in a city shelter by a fellow-resident who was after the victim's sneakers. Before Ace moved onto the Hill, he lived in an abandoned car for a while, and then, when no other option presented itself, out in the open, in Sara Delano Roosevelt Park, north of Canal Street. He was in the hospital recently with what he calls "a touch of pneumonia," and, because he is HIV-positive ("That's a part of life," Ace says), the hospital authorities insisted that he enter a shelter as a condition of his release. He was sent to the one on Wards Island—a comparatively well-managed shelter, according to Ace. "I've been in a majority of them," he told me. "It's just like being in jail, and I did too much time in my life." After a single night's stay, he fled Wards Island and made his way back to the Hill.

On Chrystie Street, above Delancey, is a drop-in center for the homeless, which is run by the Bowery Resident Committee, a city-subsidized nonprofit corporation. The facilities include showers and toilets, and the center frankly uses them to lure people into employment counselling and other forms of more enduring help. The Hill's inhabitants rarely make an appearance there, though they live only a short walk away. For most of them, even a drop-in center represents an unacceptably close brush with the bureaucracy. They would sooner use the ground for a toilet than have to explain themselves to anyone in authority.

This is not to say that the city government has nothing to offer these people. But the services they depend on the most are ones that were not intended for them. Many of the huts have electricity, siphoned from one of the lampposts on the bridge. (A number of the residents have TVs and stereos.) Water is obtained from a fire hydrant on Canal Street. The Hill's trash is removed, sporadically, by sanitation crews in the employ of the Department of Transportation, which has jurisdiction over the Hill, as it has over many odd parcels of land under or adjacent to the city's bridges and roadways. Probably none of the assorted government programs intended to "help the homeless" matter as much to the Hill's economy as New York State's bottle-return law, which, although designed for another purpose, has created employment for thousands of homeless people throughout the city. While some people on the Hill regard can-and-bottle collecting as beneath them, others regularly scour the neighborhood and deliver their bounty to the Pathmark on Pike Slip, at the base of the bridge. Sometimes there is a line of collectors waiting patiently in the Pathmark parking lot, each with his own supermarket cart full of cans and bottles.

Most of the Hill's inhabitants are enterprising scavengers of abandoned furniture and appliances. They keep what they need, and sell, barter, or give away the rest. In some cases, these activities brush up against the line that divides scavenging from thievery; in other cases, they cross well over the line. As a result, the Hill has come in for a good deal of police attention.



"Honest, Martha, I don't mean to crowd you."

The residents speak of an informal understanding with police officers from the local precinct—the Fifth—that any criminal activity is to take place outside its bounds. A point that has been impressed on them with particular vigor is that they are not to go into the cars that police officers park near the bridge when they are appearing in court. From time to time, the police have come by and searched the Hill for stolen goods. In the absence of any court ruling to the contrary, they seem to feel that dwellings on public land do not enjoy the protection of the Fourth Amendment.

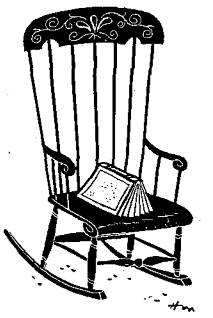
Only slightly less feared than the police are H.R.A. outreach workers, who seek to sign people up for food stamps, welfare, and other benefits. Residents of the Hill are quick to say that many of these people are perfectly nice human beings. But they have a way of appearing at settlements shortly before other city employees show up with the not so friendly aim (and hardware appropriate to the task) of knocking the huts down. The theory, apparently, is that by making sure that people qualify for all the benefits due them the city eases its conscience about what is to become of them after they are evicted. Over the last year or two, the Hill has been swept by rumors of demolition on several occasions, and residents speak of a perhaps apocryphal incident last summer when the order had gone out and a bulldozer was actually on the way, but broke down somewhere in New Jersey.

Far more appreciated are the representatives of church groups and private volunteer agencies who come around to give out food and clothing. There are also people on the Hill who value the Needle Exchange, a service provided by the militant gay organization ACT-UP. The taking of drugs by intravenous injection is widespread on the Hill, and so is AIDS. The Needle Exchange allows people to trade in as many as ten used needles for new ones. (Someone with no needles gets a basic allotment of two.) The ACT-UP volunteers also distribute condoms, bleach, and cotton, and a clearly written pamphlet that explains how to wash your works. This is a program that enjoys no city funding; in fact, eight ACT-UP volunteers are currently on trial for illegal possession of hypodermic needles.

AIDS is far from the only health problem that looms large on the Hill. On cold nights, many of the residents stay warm—or as warm as they can—by first burning wood in a trash can outside and then carrying containers loaded with glowing embers into their huts. This is a technique that may not yield any out-and-out smoke, but it doesn't make for healthy air quality, either. Partly as a consequence, respiratory infections are a common problem on the Hill, as they are among homeless people generally; in recent months, the city has been experiencing an epidemic of tuberculosis among the homeless. The omnipresent noise of truck traffic coming off the bridge—dumpster-bearing flatbeds are particularly bone-rattling—makes sleep a fitful proposition, leaving people still more vulnerable to sickness. Since most of the Hill's inhabitants have no health insurance, the only maladies for which they can hope to get treatment are those severe enough to pass muster with the emergency-room personnel in one or another of the city's public hospitals, and the decision to put oneself at the mercy of such institutions is not one that comes easily to these people.

BOOKS on the history of New York City have plenty to say about what the Hill was like in 1909, when the Manhattan Bridge was opened to the public. It was part of a small park, known as Manhattan Bridge Plaza, with grass, trees, and a fountain. The park in turn, was part of a bold effort—along with a piece of neoclassical grandiosity called the Court of Honor (an arch modelled on the Porte Saint-Denis flanked by a colonnade with a Parthenon-inspired frieze of buffalo-hunting Indians)—to redeem the city from the aesthetic disrepute in which it had been languishing since the completion, six years earlier, of the neighboring bridge to the north, the brutally functional Williamsburg.

Information about the Hill's fate over the next seventy years or so is sketchier, for historians have yet to give to the neglect and deterioration of the city's great monuments of architecture and engineering anything like the attention lavished on their design and construction. By the late nineteen-seventies, however, the Court of Honor was coated with soot and graffiti, the Bowery side of the park had become a parking lot for a housing project called Confucius Plaza, and the Hill was a fenced-in, weed-filled lot. That, at any rate, is how Indian Jim remembers it. Indian Jim and his neighbor (and former roommate) Louie are the two clear examples on the Hill of what experts call "the old homeless"—pioneers who moved onto the streets before the eighties, when a wider slice of the population followed their example. Indian Jim and Louie also call to mind the term "Bowery bum," and, in fact, the Bowery was a haunt of theirs in the years before most of its bars and flophouses were driven out of business by the northward spread of Chinatown and the eastward spread of SoHo. By Indian Jim's lights, though, Louie's devotion to liquor fails a crucial test. Louie keeps cats, and every now and then, when he has exhausted the local garbage dumps and other free sources of supply, he has been known to go down to the Pathmark and buy a few cans of cat food, at twenty-five cents apiece. Indian Jim takes the position that wine is the only product justifying an outlay of cash money. "I'm the only real alcoholic up here," he likes to say.



A broadly built man with a scar across his left cheek, Indian Jim describes himself as "Dutch, German, and Cherokee Indian"—a dangerous combination, according to Louie. Indian Jim moved to New York in the early sixties, drawn here by the lure of employment as a steelworker on the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, and driven from his native Texas by domestic difficulties. He lays the blame for many of his subsequent troubles on New York's status as "an alcoholic's paradise"—a city too tolerant of drunkenness for the good of anyone inclined that way. "Twelve years ago, I was unemployed and loused up," Indian Jim said recently, seated on a stool at Al's, the last remaining bar along a stretch of the Bowery which used to teem with them. "It was summertime, so I throwed down a piece of cardboard up there, and I slept in the weeds." Indian Jim introduced Louie to the site. They ran into each other on the street, and Louie said, "Where you flopping?"—to which Indian Jim replied, "Up there in the weeds." For a number of years, the Hill was a place to sleep whenever one or both of them were out of a job and couldn't afford a room in an S.R.O.

If the word "homeless" serves any useful purpose, it may be as a description not of a living situation but of a way of being seen by the rest of society. Homelessness in all its forms intrudes on certain widely held notions about public space and the level of order, cleanliness, and good manners that people hope to find there. The homeless understand this. They understand that the rest of us, when we think about them, imagine a world without them. Indian Jim and Louie, like most homeless people (and most New Yorkers), assumed that if they put up a hut for themselves they would be crossing a line between the barely acceptable and the intolerable. About five years ago, however, they noticed a Chinese man who was sleeping in a cardboard box on the steps of a Greek Orthodox church on Forsyth Street, directly east of the Hill. Every night, he would return to find that his house had been thrown on the nearest trash pile while he was away. Tiring of this game, the Chinese man finally moved himself and a new box up onto the Hill, and soon he began to construct something more permanent. Indian Jim and Louie had been hiding on the Hill, using the weeds as protection not only from thieves but from police officers and other agents of officialdom. The Chinese man's example emboldened them. "We looked at him," Indian Jim recalled, "and we said, 'If he can build one, we can build one.' "

The Chinese man canted his home against the steep slope at the back of the Hill, and though it has grown considerably since then, it still cuts a low profile. While the other residents come and go by way of Canal Street, he uses the back entrance, on Forsyth Street, and from his neighbors' perspective his house is almost invisible, appearing as a low roof of wooden shingles held in place by stones. The house that Indian Jim and Louie put up was a more conventional shanty—four walls and a roof, all of scrap lumber. But it, too, was low to the ground—designed to attract minimal attention.

The first resident of the Hill to approach the task of construction with a cool indifference to the outside world's opinion was Juan Samuel Ramirez, who goes by the name Sammy. A hugely energetic man with a sinewy frame, a broad mustache, long, straight hair, eyes that dart around a lot, and a big smile, Sammy grew up in the countryside of northern Puerto Rico. He left school after the seventh grade, and as a boy and a young man he butchered meat and drove a truck for his father, who raised and sold goats and other livestock. An early marriage foundered when he and his wife, who was French and a Jehovah's Witness, quarrelled over the right use of Sammy's free time. He liked to spend his weekend days at the cockfights; she wanted him in church. One day, Sammy returned home to discover that she had gone to New York, taking their two small sons with her. He followed, hoping to remedy the break, and he put down roots here after his family moved on to France. For a while, he earned a living making belts, handbags, and other leather goods and selling them from a stand outside Bloomingdale's. Then the cocaine trade beckoned. "I just got lazy, and I said, 'Well, this is a better way to make a little money,' " Sammy recalled.

Three months on Rikers Island persuaded him otherwise. Soon after his release, he ran into a former girlfriend, who asked him where he was living. He told her he was sharing an apartment on East Fifth Street. "Where are *you* staying?" he asked.

"Oh, I got my own little place," she answered.

"Let's go and see your little place," Sammy suggested.

On the way, she began to prepare him for the untraditional nature of her residence. She was living on the Hill, in a hut made largely of cardboard, with a dirt floor. Startled at first, Sammy was soon thinking along more imaginative lines. "It just came upon me, and I've been here since" is how he explains his decision to move onto the Hill. To someone with his skills and drive—and with the hundred and seventy-five dollars a month he would save by moving out of the apartment on Fifth Street—the place had all kinds of potential. After living in his girlfriend's hut for a while, and wearying of plugging the leaks with socks and rags, he built a new hut next door, followed by a bigger one next to that, and, finally, a board fence around the two, forming a kind of compound. When one of his neighbors compared Sammy's place with the ranch on the old Western series "Bonanza," Sammy leaned a wagon wheel against his fence and wrote "La Ponderosa" across it.

To Sammy, it seemed only natural that a house should be tall enough to stand up in. But when his neighbors saw what he was up to, they warned him that he was tempting the gods of the municipal bureaucracy to knock the whole settlement down. "Everybody was scared," he told me. "They said the cops were going to come. I said, 'I don't care.' " When it became clear that the cops were not going to come—at least, not in the apocalyptic sense—others were inspired to expand their houses or put up new ones.

Sammy has played a role in the Hill's recent history which might be likened to, say, Robert Moses' role in the growth of New York City from the nineteen-thirties to the nineteen-sixties. He was the first resident to bring in electricity from the lamppost, using a line of cable and conduit five hundred and seventy-five feet long and largely buried. Since demonstrating the possibility, Sammy has supplied several of his neighbors. But he has withheld the service from people who, in his judgment, might not be sufficiently attentive to the danger of fire—a constant hazard of life on the Hill, and one that, beyond the immediate threat it poses, can bring unwanted attention from city agencies capable of making trouble.

Until fairly recently, Sammy was renting out the first hut he built to a couple for five dollars a day—a sum that enabled him to buy ice for a snow-cone stand he was operating. Five dollars struck him as a modest rent, but others on the Hill, including his tenants, thought he had violated a sort of common law of homelessness dictating that cash ought not to change hands under such circumstances. Their feelings, along with a broader resentment of Sammy's position as keeper of the electricity and supplier of tools and other necessities, earned him an awkward prominence—a sort of King Rat status—in the community. On several occasions, Sammy's electricity (along with his subcontractees') was cut off, and he had to investigate the route of his supply to find the break. His tormentors would choose a point where the wires were taped together, and, after disconnecting them, seal the joint with tape again in order to render the deed invisible, thus greatly complicating Sammy's search. One night a few months ago, he awoke to discover that his house was on fire. While naming no names, Sammy is inclined to suspect that the fire was set by one of the people to whom he declined to give

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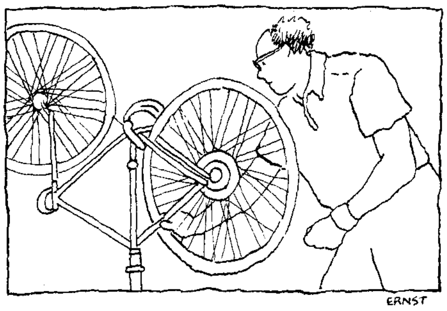
electricity. One possible moral of the story, he has theorized, is that he should not have been so generous—that if he hadn't given electricity to some, others would not have felt left out. "Every time I'm nice, this stuff happens," he has been heard to say. "When I'm just an asshole, everything's O.K."

In the three years that Sammy has been on the Hill, the community has tried to adopt a few basic rules of sanitation, discipline, and civility. During one of my visits, he spotted a neighbor relieving himself on the ground, a considerable distance away. "You're a cripple?" Sammy hollered. "You can't walk?" Turning back to me, he said, "I have to tell people they're surrounded by neighbors, not bushes."

There is a tendency to think of the homeless as idle, and the Hill's inhabitants include a few people who certainly live up to that expectation. But the spectrum extends far in the other direction. Sammy leaves early most mornings, and comes home late. His neighbors sometimes complain about the noise he makes chopping wood after they have gone to sleep. Except for the fact that he is—as the world defines it—homeless, he would strike people as a workaholic. "I call myself a one-man army," he told me. "I do a little of this, a little of that, a little of everything. I might not do it perfectly, but you have to satisfy yourself." Mostly, what he does is search for discarded books, furniture, and appliances, and then for likely buyers. "I walk around a lot, I accumulate things," he explained. Every few Sundays, he takes his goods to a flea market in SoHo. He says he never steals anything, and it is easy to believe him after seeing some of what he comes up with. On one of my recent visits, he proudly displayed an ancient vending machine for coffee, tea, and soup, of the type that dispenses the cups first and then their contents.

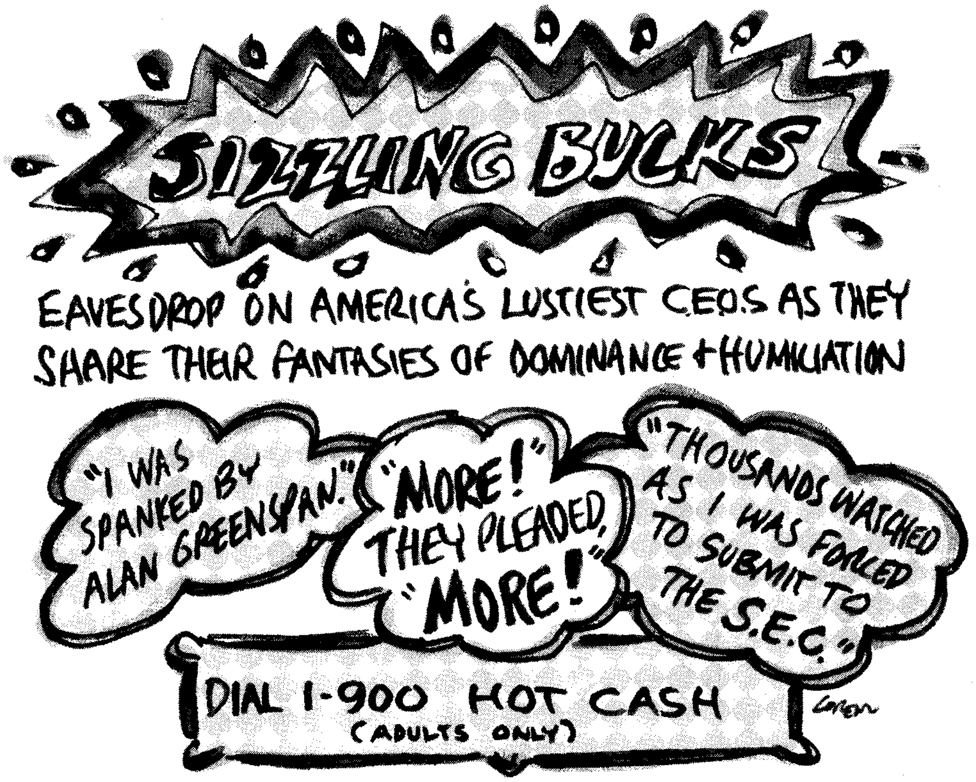
Sammy has a part-time job loading and unloading for a local tile company—a job that pays him not only in money but in skids, the ubiquitous wooden platforms used for delivery of heavy materials (such as tiles) and also for shanty construction. Such stratagems are typical of him. He used to work for a fruit vender on Grand Street. Now he gets forty dollars a week for storing the vender's stand in front of his house at night. Sammy figures that he makes nearly enough money to afford an apartment, but it is not clear to him that he would be better off with one. "I think I do better sometimes than people who've got their own apartment," he told me. "Sometimes they don't have heat, and I do." Sammy has a small collection of electric heaters, most of which are for sale, not for his personal use. His hut has double-layered walls, and enough foam in the interstices so that he rarely feels the need for a heater. "Sometimes, even in the winter, it gets so hot in here that I have to open the window to let some air in," he told me.

THE Hill has no board of directors or admissions criteria. The easiest way to move in is to know someone already living there. That way, the newcomer can get help in choosing a building site with reasonable drainage and in finding materials and putting up a hut. It would be difficult for a complete outsider to take up residence on the Hill—difficult, but not impossible. Proof of that is Yokbill Lee, who arrived about a year ago. He was born in southern China. When he was a boy, his family sent him to live with an aunt and uncle in Cuba, to help out in their grocery store there, and he emigrated to New York after the Cuban Revolution. Until several years ago, he had regular employment in the restaurant industry, as a dishwasher and a kitchen hand. Then, for reasons that seem to mystify him, he found that no one would give him a job. His hut is constructed, on the outside, largely of mattresses, cushions, carpeting, and other soft and absorbent substances, which are lashed together with ribbons and string. The exterior serves as a kind of pegboard refrigerator in the cold months of the year: on one visit, I found grapefruits, oranges, and a bag of rolled bean curd hanging there. In winter, Mr. Lee himself wears so many layers of clothing that he looks a little like his hut.



Every so often, Mr. Lee removes a swatch of interior wall, carries it outside, and puts it on the exterior, and in this fashion his hut is continually growing—to a degree that had his nearest neighbor, Sammy, so rattled recently that in a fit of fury he ran Mr. Lee off the Hill and warned him (they have Spanish as a common language) to stay away. Several days later, Mr. Lee made a cautious reappearance, removed the most recent offending addition from his hut, and, with Sammy's grudging approval, moved back into the remainder. On sunny days, Mr. Lee can often be seen up on his roof, rearranging its components or installing some piece of decoration—perhaps a paper lantern or an outsize Teddy bear. Otherwise unadorned portions of the hut are a canvas for his writings, in Chinese characters. On one panel of his house, not long ago, he had composed a kind of classified ad declaring his desire to hire several hundred thousand people at five hundred dollars a day. Mr. Lee told me (through an interpreter) that he had once had five thousand wives. "I had money," he said. "That's why I had many wives. Now I have no money, and no wives." Apart from the contretemps with Sammy, communication between Mr. Lee and his neighbors has been sparse. But that does not prevent them from proudly pointing out the architectural novelty of his hut. "Look all over—you won't find a nail in it," one of them said to me.

Mr. Lee volunteered the information that he is fit and eager to go back to work. He told me that he has repeatedly appealed for help to the Lee association, a support organization for the twenty-five-thousand-odd Chinese people of that name living in the metropolitan area. But the Lee association has been a disappointment to him, and it appears that in other respects as well he is alone in New York. This makes him an unusual—perhaps a unique—case on the Hill. Most of the residents have close ties to the outside world and its economy. Sammy has a sister who is a lawyer. Juan, who is also from Puerto Rico, professes to have one brother who is a police officer and another who runs a grocery. His father and mother own an apartment building in Greenwich Village, and Juan regularly goes there to do odd jobs and share meals. "My people give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me everything I want," he told me. "I'm the one who fucked up." Juan was gainfully employed picking up trash for a private carting company until he was sidelined a few years ago by a hand injury. He gets a disability check of a few hundred dollars every two weeks, gives most of it to his wife, who lives, with their two children, in a housing project on East Sixth Street, and keeps the rest for himself. To supplement his income, he collects cans and bottles. He has his own supermarket cart for this purpose, and knows all the likely spots. It takes him an average of about two hours, he told me, to gather a twenty-five-dollar load, and perhaps another two hours to deliver and redeem it.

Many of the people on the Hill have children, but few see much of them. Indian Jim left a wife and son behind in Texas, and hasn't had any contact with them in thirty years. One resident has a son living in New Jersey, for whom he was recently storing—as a present—a fine-looking toy car, big enough for a boy to sit in. One day, a nattily dressed man saw the car as he was driving by on the bridge, thought it would make a fine present for his own son, and, after parking on Canal, ascended the Hill to make an offer. After a brief round of negotiations, it seemed that his offer had been refused, but as he started to leave the owner of the car came striding after him with a new concession, and the sale was made—for four dollars.

Sammy hasn't seen his two sons in France since the seventies. He gets news of them, occasionally, in phone conversations with his mother, back in Puerto Rico. "Sometimes I feel sad, but what can I do?" he said to me. "They are there, and I'm here. It costs money to go there. I could call them by phone, but my pride won't let me call collect." With his girlfriend, Sammy has three daughters, each of whom was sent at an early age to live with their maternal grandmother, in Virginia. Sammy and his girlfriend have spoken of moving to Virginia themselves, but they have held back, Sammy told me, because of a methadone program in which she is enrolled. I was unable to get his girlfriend's thoughts on this question, or any question. She keeps to herself, apparently out of deference to Sammy's views regarding the place of women—views shared, it seems, by most of the men on the Hill, and endured by most of the women.

People move away from the Hill occasionally, but not as often as they talk about doing so. About a year ago, Indian Jim was struck by a car, and found himself in Beekman Hospital. A social worker came to visit him there, and offered to get him into a shelter. "I'll accept jail, but I'll not accept a shelter," Indian Jim replied. He demanded to see a negligence lawyer, but the hospital had a policy against allowing such people on the premises. "The other hospitals allow you to see a lawyer after you get hit," Indian Jim told me indignantly. After his release, though, he found a lawyer, and his hopes for the future have been tied ever since to the prospect of an insurance settlement. He has heard that an injury like his—broken leg, broken foot—is worth about ten thousand dollars, or six thousand after the lawyer takes his cut. If the money comes through, he plans to move to Florida, where he hopes to find a home with an orange tree in the back yard. In recent months, however, his lawyer has been warning him that he may have to lower his sights, because of evidence suggesting that Indian Jim was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the accident. Indian Jim says he will not stand for such treatment. "Reduce me, hell!" he exclaimed. "I know guys who've been out here drunk, and they got the full amount!" Every so often, he walks over to the lawyer's office, on lower Broadway, and comes away with fifty dollars, which represents not only money in the pocket but, he hopes, a sign that a settlement is still in the works.

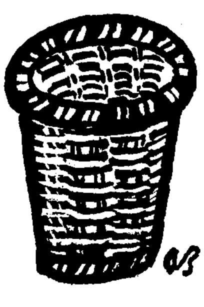
About six months ago, word reached Ace that a former employer of his, hearing of Ace's misfortunes, had offered him a job. With high hopes, Ace left for Philadelphia to move in with his sister and take up a new career as a security guard. Several weeks later, he was back on the Hill. He had become embroiled in an altercation with his brother-in-law, he explained to me, and it had seemed advisable to leave town.

A good bet to get away, I judged early in my conversations on the Hill, was Ali, a native of Yemen, who had a remarkably confident and playful manner, considering his circumstances. Ali struck me as an anomalous presence on the Hill, even before he mentioned that he had received a master's degree in business administration from the University of Michigan. He seemed particularly out of place during the Gulf War, when, to compound the novelty of being the only Arab on the Hill, he had the temerity and the poor judgment to suggest that Saddam

Hussein might win. (The war enjoyed nearly the same high level of support on the Hill as it did in the nation as a whole.) Ali spoke of his current station in life as a temporary one, soon to be corrected. Among the factors seemingly working in his favor were a cousin employed at the Yemeni Embassy, in Washington (which was, Ali said, a possible next stop for him), the ability to generate cash (I once saw him with a wad of hundred-dollar bills in his hand, hiring people to help him put up a new hut), and a certain capitalist know-how, honed, he said, during a period as the owner of a supermarket on Mermaid Avenue, in Coney Island.

Ali was often away from the Hill, and when there he often seemed to have an imminent engagement. He repeatedly promised to sit down for an interview sometime. But the time never seemed to come, and I was still waiting for our interview to happen when I learned, in March, that he was in jail, accused of burglary.

One night a few weeks ago, Ali was back on the Hill, looking much less ebullient than his pre-incarceration self. When I renewed my request for an interview, he accepted with an air of "What's the difference?" and we walked to a Chinese restaurant a few blocks east along Canal. On the way, Ali warned me not to believe everything I had heard on the Hill. "Seventy per cent of what he told you is lies," he said, of someone I had already interviewed. "What *I* tell you is one-hundred-per-cent the truth." (When our interview was over, he volunteered that his percentage had been more like ninety.) The story he told me, over a plate of chicken curry, was uncharacteristically sombre in tone and harshly self-critical. Ali's career in the supermarket business and its attendant middle-class existence in Brooklyn had been undone, it seemed, by a weakness for crack and trips to Las Vegas. Hopelessly in debt, he had sold the supermarket to a friend, and, with another friend, had carved out a new career for himself in the breaking-and-entering field. Ali's role, evidently, was an outside one, but the police had found him on the street one night carrying a fax machine and a couple of fancy telephones, and by the simple expedient of calling the number on one of the phones they established where the goods had been taken from. Ali eventually pleaded guilty to possession of stolen property and was sentenced to time served, which came to fifty-five days.



He had done his time in the Tombs, a facility for which he was full of praise. While there, he said, he had not only purged his system of cocaine but had eaten a good, clean Muslim diet, with an emphasis on vegetables and grains. Ali remarked that the best thing that could happen to most of the people on the Hill would be to be forced into a drug-free environment, as he had been. He had left the Tombs a new man, he told me. That same day, however, he had paid a visit to his former partner, and had taken up his crack habit anew. "You can't see somebody smoking in front of your face and just say 'No, I don't want it,'" Ali explained. He told me that it was only a matter of time before he gave up crack once and for all, but he seemed to be waiting for divine intervention. "I have decided, but now He has to decide," he told me.

Ali's parents are in the real-estate business in Yemen, and I inquired if they could be appealed to for plane fare home. He replied that he had written them for money many times in the past, and they had never failed him. (Although he is thirty-four, his usual explanation for needing money is that he is taking a course. When I asked him if his parents believe him, Ali laughed—one of his few displays of emotion in the interview—and assured me that they believe everything he tells them.) But he could not go home to Yemen just yet, he said, because he refused to let his family and friends see him in his current state. First, he would have to go off somewhere on his own and get himself straight, and to tide him over the period of detoxification, he calculated, he would need a sum in the neighborhood of, say, twenty-five thousand dollars. Then he would make a glorious return to Yemen. "When I go, I want to surprise my family—*boom!*" he declared.

LAST July, the New York *Post* ran a story describing the Hill as "the city's next battleground between squatters and rent-payers." The story quoted a local real-estate agent, who pointed with disgust to the trash cascading onto Canal and Forsyth Streets and complained that Chinatown had been made a dumping ground for problems that other neighborhoods would never put up with. It is easy to see things from his perspective, especially if you try to imagine what would happen if a shantytown plopped down on, say, Park Avenue in the Eighties. Of course, the homeless know better than to build in such a neighborhood; they go where they have some hope of not being disturbed. The Hill's inhabitants are living on a site that was all but abandoned before they got there. They have as much right as most non-homeless people, perhaps, to feel that they have improved on what came before, and more right than most to think of themselves as having built a community from the ground up. People fight a lot on the Hill, but they exhibit a degree of neighborliness not to be found in every high-rent apartment building. If someone is sick, others will urge him to go to the hospital, and help him get there if he needs help. If a van from a church or a social-service agency stops by with a handout of food or clothing, those receiving it are expected to think of the needs of those who don't happen to be around at the time.

These things were true before the arrival of Gabriele Schafer and Nick Fracaro, seven months ago, but they have become more evident since. Gabriele and Nick are the proprietors of the tepee. Nick has shoulder-length reddish-brown hair and looks like a cavalryman who has gone Indian. He grew up on a farm in Illinois. Gabriele has short dark hair, regular features, and a soft-spoken manner that nicely complements Nick's personality, which is more intense. She comes from West Germany. They met when, as fellow-students at the University of Illinois, they were cast as lovers in Jean Genet's "The Balcony," and the casting took. Another Genet production—"Deathwatch," at the Illinois State Penitentiary (on which they collaborated with an inmate theatre group called the Con Artistes)—was the springboard for the formation of Thieves' Theatre, a company that, according to its original, Genet-inspired statement of purpose, seeks "to embody and articulate the voice of those who are stigmatized, quarantined, disenfranchised" and "to lift the barriers between us and them." For the company's second major effort, a production of "Marat/Sade" in Toronto, Nick and Gabriele assembled a cast drawn partly from the local punk community and partly from a society of ex-mental patients who had organized against the psychiatric profession.

Nick and Gabriele share a job in a movie-production warehouse in Queens, and they have an apartment in Brooklyn, though lately they have been living mainly on the Hill. Nick likes to nurse an idea for a while before moving ahead with it. He had been making noises for months about a theatrical project involving the homeless—something that would link them with the nomadic tradition stretching back through the centuries, and assert a view of homelessness as, in his words, "a chosen way of life rather than an imposed condition"—when, early last year, Gabriele began executing some sketchy plans from a book called "The Indian Tipi," by Reginald and Gladys Laubin. When the tepee was finished, Nick felt a duty to put it up somewhere, and after a period of scouting around his eye fell on the Hill.

Their original notion was to live on the Hill for six months to a year while researching and preparing a production of "Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape With Argonauts," a work by the East German playwright Heiner Müller. "In the ideal of ideals," Gabriele told me, "we would move the tepee around the country, and it would be part of the performance. The tepee would travel in the summer, and the Hill would be the equivalent of the winter camp." With the passage of time, however, that plan has been, although not forgotten, shelved in favor of a more immediate and amorphous program whose exact nature is a subject of fairly constant discussion between them. "We're just trying to be up there, and to allow things to happen by being there," Nick told me. "We're researching our lives up there while we're living there, and we're looking at the reaction of people on the outside—to us and everyone else. It's both the epitome of our work in the theatre and, at the same time, the end of it. We're living in a tepee, without a script and without any performance dates."

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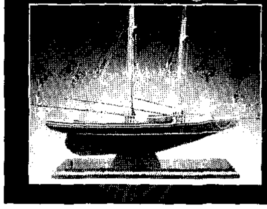

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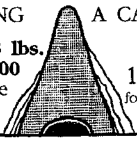

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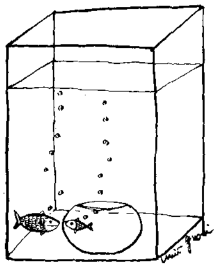
both insist, is social work. "We don't want to sound like do-gooders," Gabriele told me. "We stay away from that." Just the same, they have sometimes become fired up about some positive turn in the life of one of their neighbors, and, almost as often, discouraged when it has proved illusory—an outcome in which drugs have generally played a part.

During their time there, however, the Hill has changed in subtle but noticeable ways. The tepee, which they have declared a drug-and-alcohol-free zone, has become a sort of community center and a source of coffee in the morning. Nick has done a good deal of cleaning up, sometimes enlisting others in the effort. Gabriele has drawn portraits of just about all the residents, and put the pictures up on the inside of the tepee. In December, Nick and Gabriele invited their neighbors to a steak dinner on the occasion of the centenary of the massacre at Wounded Knee. On Easter Sunday, they bought a lamb, and Nick and Sammy skinned and butchered it, chopped up tree branches to make supports for a spit, and presided over a Puerto Rican-style barbecue with a sauce of Sammy's concoction. Nick has bought a number of disposable cameras and given them out to others on the Hill, who now join him in sneaking up on furtive photographers and snapping their pictures—a less provocative alternative to the previous practice of throwing rocks at such people. "Do unto others what they shouldn't be doing unto you" is how Ace (an enthusiastic participant) sums up the thinking behind the anti-photographer policy. The snapshots have been mounted on animal hides and hung, like scalps, on a pole outside the tepee.



In March, there was a rash of visits from H.R.A. outreach workers, and rumor had it that the city was preparing to raze the settlement. Hoping to find out what the story was, I called up the H.R.A., and spoke with one of the outreach workers who had made an appearance on the Hill. He told me that there was no ulterior motive behind the visits. He and his colleagues were merely concerned about living conditions there, he said, and they wanted the residents to know their options. He had tried to explain (in order to dispel a major concern of people in such settlements) that there are shelters where couples can stay together, as long as "they are in the same budget." He had tried to convey the message that a shelter is a temporary situation, leading to a room in an S.R.O., or perhaps even to an apartment. Despite these arguments, few people had signed up for any of the benefits he offered.

The Department of Transportation has had several shantytowns dismantled, but when I reached Joe DePlasco, a spokesman for the department, he told me that there were no such plans concerning the Hill. "We've taken a rather reformist position on this," he said. "We've tried not to relocate people. Unless there's a threat to one of our structures, it doesn't help us and it doesn't help them." The Manhattan Bridge has structural problems in abundance, but the Hill, it seems, isn't contributing to them.

In April, Gabriele put together an application for a grant, to be used largely to plant grass and do some landscaping on the Hill, and she approached a local foundation that sponsors self-help projects involving the poor. The response was discouraging. The foundation, one of its officials told Gabriele, preferred projects that would "bring change"—a phrase that in the homelessness context appeared to mean getting people off the street. After a friendly back-and-forth about what constitutes change and how to achieve it, Gabriele decided that she would give up on the grant idea for the time being and see what could be done without outside money. She bought some seeds and seedlings, and, with help from Nick and Louie, planted them in a plot of ground next to the bridge. Every day, tens of thousands of people drive by the Hill, and many of them get a good long look at the place as they wait for the traffic light at Canal and Chrystie to turn green. In recent weeks, they have been staring harder. To the spectacle of a shantytown with a tepee at its center has been added the fresh incongruity of a tiny garden, in which, some mornings, a couple of shanty dwellers can be seen sprinkling water over an assortment of summer flowers and a handful of pepper and tomato plants.

—JAMES LARDNER

MUSICAL EVENTS

Knight's Progress

THE Matter of Britain has inspired many composers, among them Purcell, Wagner, and Roger Sessions (who at the age of twelve composed his opera "Lancelot and Elaine"). The latest Arthurian opera is Sir Harrison Birtwistle's "Gawain," which was commissioned by the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, and received six performances there in May and June. It stands high among the fifteen or so works that the company has created since the war, including operas by Britten, Tippett, Vaughan Williams, Peter Maxwell Davies, and Hans Werner Henze. Birtwistle's source was the fourteenth-century "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," a great poem that tells of chivalric adventure, man and nature, magic and morality. Brian Stone, introducing his modern-English translation, says truly, "The grand design, no less than the beauty and organic variety of the parts, proclaims the poet a genius of a kind without parallel in early English literature."

King Arthur celebrates Christmas at Camelot. Into his court there rides a green giant, mounted on a huge green horse and bearing in one hand a holly branch, in the other an axe. The visitor proposes a "Christmas game": Let any knight present strike off my head, and a year and a day hence submit his own neck in a return round. Arthur's nephew Gawain accepts the challenge; the Green Knight picks up his severed head, which announces the Green Chapel as the place of rendezvous, and rides forth. The seasons pass. (Twenty-seven years ago, Birtwistle made a choral work from the lines that tell of their passing.) Gawain undertakes his journey through the icebound land—

> Near slain with the sleet he slept in his irons
> More nights than enough in naked rocks,
> Where clattering from the crest the cold burn ran
> And hung high over his head in hard icicles—

until he reaches a castle where he receives a fine welcome. For three days, while the jolly lord of the castle, Sir Bertilak de Hautdesert, goes hunting, his lady attempts to seduce Gawain, but in vain. Gawain does, however, accept from the lady a green girdle that she says will save his life, and he conceals from her husband that he has done so. In the Green Chapel—which proves to be an overgrown barrow—the Green Knight merely nicks Gawain's neck and then identifies himself as Sir Bertilak: the slight wound is Gawain's punishment for the slight sin of having concealed the girdle, and the whole affair has been a contrivance of Arthur's half sister Morgan le Fay, that implacable foe of the Round Table. Gawain has passed his test—not with full marks but with only one small discredit. He returns to Camelot and is merrily acclaimed; the knights of the Round Table decide to don green sashes in his honor. But Gawain himself is rueful; he wears the lady's green girdle as "the token of untruth that I am taken in." Birtwistle and his librettist, the poet David Harsent, stress his remorse and the self-knowledge that he has gained. Gawain punctuates the long finale of praise with a resolutely deprecatory refrain, "I'm not that hero." His last lines are:

> I'm a spoiled reputation,
> I'm bad blood,
> a symptom of sorrow . . .
>
> They looked for someone glorious
> with wounds and trophies.
> I'm not that hero.

Commentary on "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" has been copious, but Birtwistle's "Gawain" is not an interpretation, gloss, or explanatory reading. Rather, it presents the mythic matter in long stretches of strong, vivid, beautiful music. In dramatizing the poem for the stage, the collaborators followed Michael Bogdanov's 1971 dramatization by making Morgan le Fay a presence from the start. In the poem, her role as instigator of the adventures is revealed only late; in the opera, she has the first and the final words. Unseen by the others, she and her accomplice, the lady, haunt Arthur's court rather as the Queen of the Night haunts Sarastro's. From a practical point of view, their voices can add gleaming layers to a texture that would otherwise be all male except for Queen Guinevere.

Matter and themes similar to those of "Sir Gawain" have long underpinned Birtwistle compositions: landscapes, and journeys of exploration through them (fixed features viewed

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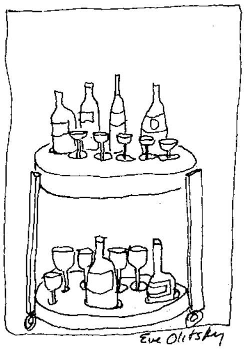
from ever new aspects); the slow, inevitable progress of the seasons (cyclic pattern against which men run the lines of their lives); ritual enactments whose repetitions gain significance at each recurrence. So that listeners could attend the new opera well prepared, well attuned, for two weeks around the première the BBC broadcast each weekday an hour of Birtwistle's earlier music, introduced by the composer. It also broadcast the last performance of the opera and recorded it for future television transmission. At the Aldeburgh Festival, there was a new production of Birtwistle's first opera, "Punch and Judy." "Gawain," which has two acts, of about a hundred and about ninety minutes, is a demanding piece. It moves more deliberately than "The Mask of Orpheus," the Birtwistle opera that the English National Opera produced five years ago; it contains less incident, and the music is less various in paces and textures. A glib likeness might be to a "Parsifal" composed by Edgard Varèse; that can also serve to indicate the force, the animation, the vitality along every line, and the uncompromising quality of the score. Technical description would call for charts and quotations. In impressionistic terms, the music suggests sounds hewn from the eternal rocks, plucked from the storm, calmly created by contemplation of a large, still landscape. The messages are ancient, the methods new. Brasses swell, perhaps with grinding, granite stress. Song wells out. Sudden cries and signals ring forth. Layer is laid upon layer, in carefully controlled perspectives. The music is sometimes craggy, sometimes very delicate.

The Middle English poem already contains what has been called an interlace: of Sir Bertilak's three days of hunting—after deer, boar, and fox—and his lady's three attempts on Gawain's virtue. Birtwistle seizes on the simultaneities, and he and his librettist have contrived another, more elaborate interlace: their first-act finale is at once a ritual arming of Gawain for his ordeal—with cuirass, hauberk, morion, sword, and pentangle shield—and a five-season masque (beginning and ending with winter), each season of which is also a progress from night to day. Baldwin, Arthur's chaplain (a countertenor), sings verses of the Dies Irae and leads a choir (it was Harry Christopher's The Sixteen) in five Marian antiphons; there is an offstage chorus; there are solo lines for Gawain, Arthur, Guinevere, the principal knights, and the court jester, and also for Morgan le Fay and the lady; in the orchestra, "the world turns"—a recurrent phrase of the libretto. Musically a great deal is happening while onstage, for nearly half an hour, very little happens. During the long second-act finale, even less happens, except in the music. One is reminded of Birtwistle's slow processional "The Triumph of Time" (1972) and his "Earth Dances" (1986): massive half-hour-and-more concert pieces that are highly dramatic and are filled with exciting incident but are not "theatre music" in any conventional sense. His "Secret Theatre" (1984) is another drama of musical deeds enacted in a landscape created by music. Stretches of "Gawain" are opera for the ears, calling for—and rewarding—hard, intent listening. In an interview Birtwistle said, "I've tried to make a separate drama for the orchestra, so the instruments are like voices, but you can't hear what they're singing; there's another drama which is secret."

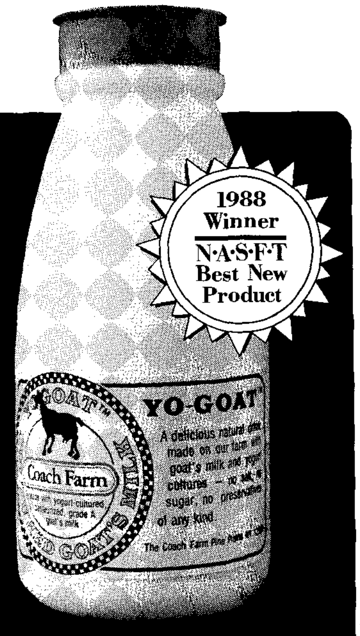


"Gawain" could be—for popular success it probably should be—dressed up more colorfully than it was at its première, which was staged by Di Trevis (director), Alison Chitty (designer), and Paul Pyant (lighting designer). All three have worked at the National Theatre, where from 1975 to 1982 Birtwistle was music director. The "Sir Gawain" manuscript begins with an illustration of Arthur and his knights clad in bright colors. Contrast of the gay, civilized court with, on the one hand, grim white winter outside and, on the other, nature's incursion and promise of renewal in the person of the Green Knight on his green horse is an important element of the poem and of—or so I hear it—Birtwistle's score. Morgan le Fay, resentful of Arthur's disciplined society, enlists nature in her attempt to destroy its pretensions; honest, incorruptible nature's representative, who would no doubt have beheaded Gawain without compunction had he proved unworthy, judges fairly; from Morgan's wiles Gawain gains an understanding akin to that which Parsifal gained from Kundry's. But Miss Chitty dressed Arthur and his knights in linsey-woolsey gray. Her masque of the seasons was a monotonous circular traipsing round and round the stage with but tiny, scarce-noticeable costume changes—altered sashes on three of the traipsers, small additions to the wreaths that they carried. It was hard to know what season we were in. A few touches caught the generous high spirits of Birtwistle's music; the Green Knight's merry, mettled pantomime horse was one. In an understated, intelligent way, the scenes were distinguished and beautiful, but they did little to articulate the score. Gawain was played by François Le Roux, that excellent artist; his lyric baritone was kept at full stretch by the heavy role. An admirable cast included experienced Birtwistle interpreters: Marie Angel (Morgan le Fay), Penelope Walmsley-Clark (Guinevere), John Tomlison (the Green Knight), Omar Ebrahim (the jester). The words of Elizabeth Laurence (the lady) were among the more audible. Elgar Howarth, who was the composer's fellow-student in Manchester, and who introduced "The Mask of Orpheus" so impressively, inspired and led a stirring, evidently confident performance.

"Gawain" is a more wieldy opera than "The Mask of Orpheus," which contains a hundred and twenty-six "events" in its complicated structure, calls for triple casting (singer, actor, and puppet) of the principals, and needed a six-man team to control the electronic elements. Covent Garden has scheduled a revival of "Gawain" two years hence (the composer, one learns, is considering cuts), and I imagine that other companies will take up the piece—hardly the Met, but perhaps Santa Fe, the City Opera, or the Opera Company of Boston.

MEANWHILE, Glyndebourne's all-Mozart season was under way, with revivals of "Figaro" and "Idomeneo," and a new production of "Così Fan Tutte," directed by Trevor Nunn and set, by Maria Bjørnson, aboard the cruise ship S.S. Napoli. I listened to the "Così" over the air and, undistracted by whatever ingenious inventions the famous team had found for Mozart's opera, thought it the best, most freshly conducted account of the work I had ever heard. Simon Rattle conducted the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. The cast was half American: Gianna Rolandi as Despina, Kurt Streit as Ferrando, and Jake Gardner as Guilelmo. Mr. Streit's command of word and phrase was as sure, shapely, and captivating in Italian as it has been in German.

In addition to "Gawain," Covent Garden presented, in Riverside Studios, six new one-act chamber operas it had commissioned. One of the triple bills into which they were grouped held little of interest, and I missed the other. Do Britain's young composers become conservative, or had Covent Garden just made conservative choices? At the Coliseum, the English National Opera was closing its all-twentieth-century season (barring a few Mozarts) with six weeks of "Peter Grimes," "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk," "The Cunning Little Vixen," and Stephen Oliver's latest opera, "Timon of Athens." Oliver, at forty-one, is a seasoned dramatic composer. He has written some fifty operas—several of them, admittedly, very short—of which thirty-five have been produced, and music for more than ninety plays, "Nicholas Nickleby" among them. This summer, Glyndebourne does "La Clemenza di Tito" with recitatives newly composed by him, and Batignano stages his completion of Mozart's abandoned "L'Oca del Cairo." The earlier full-length operas of Oliver that I know—"The Duchess of Malfi" (1971), "Tom Jones" (1976), and "Beauty and the Beast" (1984)—are lively and arresting; "Timon" was a disappointment, unexpectedly dull. The piece is earnestly and honorably conceived: Shakespeare's harsh, bitter play has been abridged and recast, by the composer, as a study in friendships fickle or true, with modern overtones of friends' abandoning a stricken, doomed victim—plunged from his former exuberance into despair—or supporting him and helping him to his death. But the all-male cast—the principals baritones or basses—declaimed slow-moving, melodically unmemorable lines against a muddy, brass-thick accompaniment, and few words were audible. Graham Vick's production—gray suits in a gray box of a set—was matchingly drab. The



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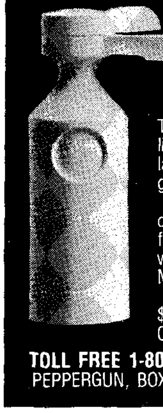

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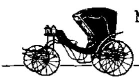

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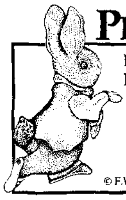

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protagonist, Monte Jaffe, shouted and wobbled. What should have been moving was boring.

"Grimes"—a new production, by Tim Albery—was electric. The lack of picturesque nineteenth-century detail might have displeased the composer, but the essentials of sea and sky, and all that they represent, were powerfully present in Hildegard Bechtler's uncluttered sets. I heard a second cast that had no "second cast" feeling about it. Graeme Matheson-Bruce, taking over from Philip Langridge, was an exciting protagonist. Susan Bullock, taking over from Josephine Barstow, was an Ellen Orford of uncommon naturalness, dignity, and eloquence. Noel Davies, taking over from David Atherton, conducted a taut performance of the great score.

"Lady Macbeth" was electric, too. A 1987 production, it had been revived largely by sponsorship from many members of the faithful E.N.O. audience. David Pountney's production is "political," set in Stalin's butcher shop—but then so was Shostakovich's opera. Mr. Pountney and Mark Elder, the conductor, wonderfully conveyed the ferocity, the brilliance, the savagely hilarious satire, the profound compassion of the dazzling score. Miss Barstow was a stunning heroine.

The "Vixen" was a production that Mr. Pountney and Miss Bjørnson created eleven years ago, as part of the Janáček "cycle" that Scottish Opera and the Welsh National Opera toured through Britain; the E.N.O. took it up in 1988. It is an unsentimental, unkitschy, truthful presentation of an opera that can easily be reduced to cuteness. In the title role, Lesley Garrett—an admired Papagena, Sophie, Oscar—displayed how a light soprano unforced by premature ambition can grow steadily toward lyric-soprano amplitude without losing purity.

I caught the E.N.O. at a peak. Financial cares now assail it. The fine old theatre it inhabits is privately owned, and the lease will come up for renewal. In 1993, Peter Jonas, the general director, is leaving, to head the Munich Opera; Mr. Elder, the music director, and Mr. Pountney, the director of productions, will be leaving, too. What's to come is still unsure. May it be direction that sustains the company's high dedication to opera as an art that matters.

—ANDREW PORTER

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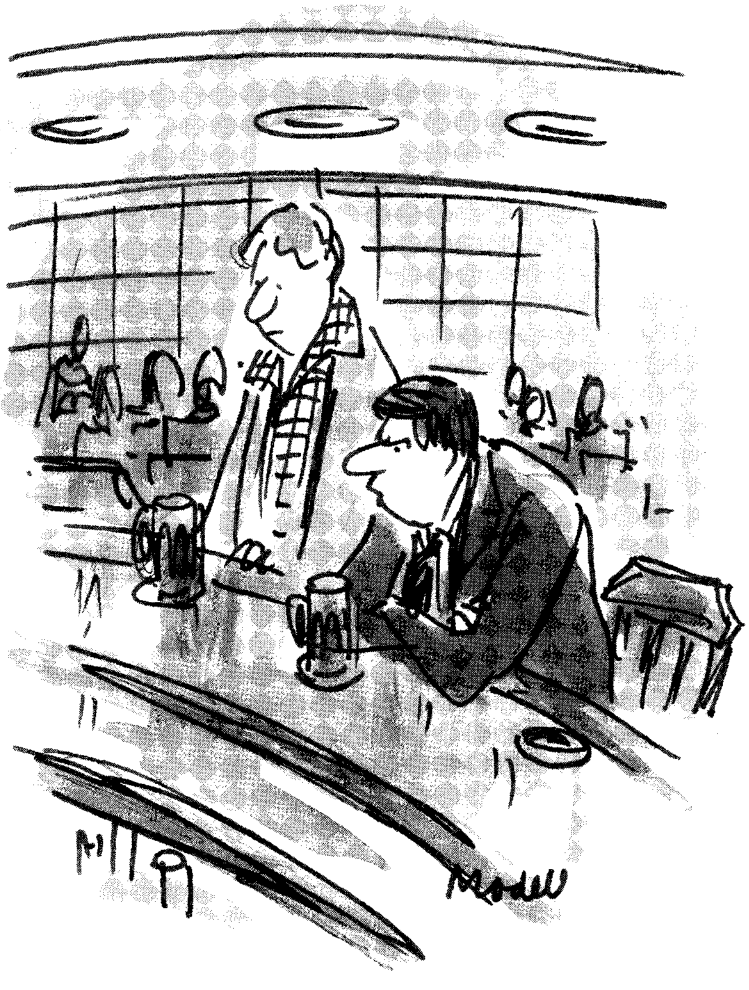
EVERY European Jew who survived the Holocaust has an amazing story to tell. The usual skills that human beings exercise in order to ward off the world's dangers didn't, in themselves, provide an adequate defense against the organized ferocity of the Final Solution. Courage, prudence, and guile were rarely enough, and every survivor's history has, necessarily, elements of the miraculous: unexpected, often inexplicable, acts of kindness; providential oversights on the part of the authorities; happy accidents of timing; one-in-a-million convergences of favorable circumstances. Among all these tales of wonder—of just-missed hiding places and impossible reprieves—none is more bizarre than that of Salomon Perel, a German Jew who spent much of the war passing for Aryan in an élite Hitler Youth academy. Perel's memoir, "Europa Europa," was published in France last year (it hasn't yet been translated into English), and this improbable narrative of a Jew's coming of age among the Nazis is the basis of a superb new movie by the Polish director Agnieszka Holland. Her film, which retains the title of Perel's autobiography, dramatizes young Solly's wartime experiences with a surprisingly light touch. It bounds from one jaw-dropping episode to the next with the speed and the unnerving neutrality of a picaresque adventure, and never pauses to judge its ambiguous hero; it's content to let the ironies of his situation collect around him like reflections in dressing-room mirrors.

Right from the start, Holland adopts a magic-realist tone. The first images of "Europa Europa" are of Solly (Marco Hofschneider) underwater. As he flails and struggles in this undefined place, we hear his voice on the soundtrack telling us that he was born in Germany in 1925, and that he shares a birthday (April 20th) with Adolf Hitler; and this coincidence, this bit of cosmic irony, seems to signify—in a literary way—that the hero is somehow singular, marked for a special destiny. From this skewed fairy-tale prologue the movie cuts to the scene of Solly's circumcision, which the narrator claims to actually remember. And from there Holland takes us swiftly forward to 1938; Solly, on the eve of his bar mitzvah, is enjoying a leisurely bath when a rock thrown by jeering bands of Nazis in the street below crashes through the bathroom window, and he flees the apartment to take refuge in a barrel. That night, our hero, who has left his clothes in the apartment, asks a neighbor to bring him something to wear; all she can find for him is a black coat with a swastika armband, and it's in this appalling getup that he returns home, to find that his sister is dead—she's laid out in the dining room, her blood dripping onto the very table at which Solly was circumcised. These brisk and beautifully controlled opening scenes have a poetic clarity that haunts us for the rest of the movie: Holland makes us conscious, from the outset, of the significance of water and blood, and of the terrible contrast between the Nazis' uniforms, covering their wearers with the armor of totalitarian iconography, and the exposed flesh of the Reich's victims. When, later in the film, circumstances force the hero to live in that uniform as if it were the full expression of himself, we remain constantly aware (as he is) of what the clothes conceal—the circumcised penis, the irreversible and unambiguous sign of Solly's identity as a Jew. By the time the movie is over, we understand why the hero believes that he can remember his bris. During the war, his circumcision acquires the unwanted status of the defining event in his young life. How could he forget the operation that left him so cruelly unprotected? The world he lives in from 1938 to 1945 won't let him forget it. Every time he has to urinate, or take a bath or a shower, he risks exposure, and the prospect of a sexual encounter generates emotional havoc: his feelings alternate, excruciatingly, between intense adolescent desire and abject fear. The movie shows us the thoroughness of Nazi terror in the pained expression of a teen-age boy who doesn't dare allow himself to be seduced.



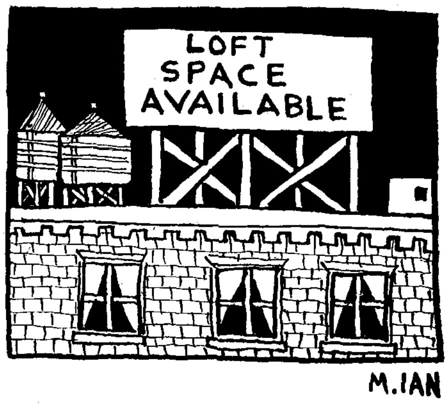
"We were getting along fine—then she began trying to bring out the best in me."

As Holland has constructed the story, this physical evidence of Solly's Jewishness is the fulcrum of the movie's delicately balanced narrative and moral tensions. She uses the ever-present threat that Solly will be caught with his pants down as a means of creating suspense, but she does a lot more with it than that. In the course of the film she makes us understand that the fact of Solly's circumcision is, in a sense, all that keeps him honest. If he could wish his missing bit of foreskin back into existence, he could get into bed with anyone, literally and metaphorically. He's an awfully adaptable kid. He's attractive, personable, good at languages, and deft at lying, and he isn't burdened with an excess of religious zeal: he has a talent for blending in with whatever surroundings he finds himself in, for becoming whatever the people around him want him to be. (His quick instincts in sizing up changes in a situation and his chameleonlike ability to change himself along with it are the qualities of a picaresque hero.) By the time Solly is initiated into the Hitler Youth, he has already run through several identities, and has proved himself capable of playing his roles with conviction and enthusiasm.

After his sister's death, his family fled to Lodz, in Poland, and when his parents heard that the German Army was approaching they ordered Solly and his older brother Isaac (Rene Hofschneider) to pack up and head east, toward the Soviet Union. The movie shows us a few pointed scenes of Solly's life in a Soviet school: he becomes a star pupil, and is accepted—despite his petit-bourgeois origins—into the most prestigious Communist youth organization, the Komsomol. We see him stand before an assembly of his student comrades and give a fervent, impeccably Stalinist oration on the evils of religion; and then, after the Germans attack and he has been taken prisoner, we see him renounce his Communist ideology and reincarnate himself, on the spot, as an orphaned "pure" German, an Aryan child wandering in the barbaric eastern wilderness. His captors are so charmed and moved by his story that they ignore his lack of identity papers. By turning himself into the hero of a Nazi fairy tale, Solly stirs the tender emotions of the Wehrmacht soldiers and earns the privilege of accompanying them, as translator and mascot, on their march through Russia. He's very popular: one officer falls in love with him; the commander of the unit wants to adopt him.

So when Solly arrives at the Hitler Youth school he has had plenty of practice in conforming to the expectations of totalitarian institutions. And we have seen how skillful he is at disarming his enemies, how proficient he is at using his youth and beauty and glibness to dazzle and distract his pursuers. Putting on his Hitler Youth uniform for the first time, Solly breaks into a grin and does a silly little soft-shoe in front of the mirror, as if to loosen himself up for the twenty-four-hour-a-day performance he knows he's going to have to give. Everything that's most appealing in him is in this frisky, parodic dance—as well as everything that's most disturbing. The situation he's in won't allow him to sustain a playful attitude toward his latest act of impersonation: his youthful delight in getting away with something is attenuated by the intolerable pressure of never being able to rest—he's playing his part ceaselessly, without intermission.

In these circumstances, which would test even the strongest, most fully formed identity, this malleable teen-ager is often tempted to resolve his emotional tensions by surrendering to his role, losing himself in the embrace of the enemy's culture and ideology. In one terrifying scene, the film shows us the brown-shirted students' response to the news of the German Army's defeat in Russia: they weep, and Solly, giving in to the collective emotion of the moment, weeps with them. His desire to reduce the cognitive dissonance of his existence—to live a "normal" life in the perverse and monolithic universe of the Reich—reaches a heartbreaking climax when he attempts, in the privacy of a bathroom stall, to alter the unalterable, to erase the last vestige of his Jewishness. Working, painfully, with bits of thread, he tries to extend the flesh of his penis into something resembling a foreskin. These scenes of self-mutilation—of exhausted surrender to the impulse to annihilate oneself in uniformity—are unbearably intimate. We know that Solly has undertaken this grotesque experiment in part so he can satisfy a fundamental human appetite: he wants to sleep with his girlfriend. (This blond beauty, played by Julie Delpy, is a passionately committed Nazi and a rabid anti-Semite; she wants to bear a child for the Führer.) Holland, sympathetic and yet pitilessly objective, makes these passages seem a kind of apotheosis of the ironies in Solly Perel's extraordinary story. In all the art and history of the Holocaust, there is no clearer image of the cost of survival—of the unnatural forms that even this most basic instinct can sometimes take. At such moments we see the hero of "Europa Europa" as a creature immersed in ambiguities, not drowning but not surfacing, either—a young man who can't allow himself simply to be. In dangerous circumstances, he manages to reach maturity, and that's a victory, but his sense of self is stillborn. He seems, at the end, an elusive, undefinable entity: a boy forever on the eve of his bar mitzvah.



In the movie's final scene, Holland shows us the real Salomon Perel: he's a bald, sixty-five-year-old man standing on the bank of a river in Israel (where he has lived since the war). As the camera rests on him, in closeup, we try to read his features, to find in them some clue to the meaning of his almost inconceivable experience. Like most faces, Perel's is ultimately inscrutable. He looks mournful and somewhat dazed, but it's difficult to attribute even these qualities to him with any certainty: we may be only projecting our own emotions and expectations onto him, as the Soviets and the Nazis did when he was young.

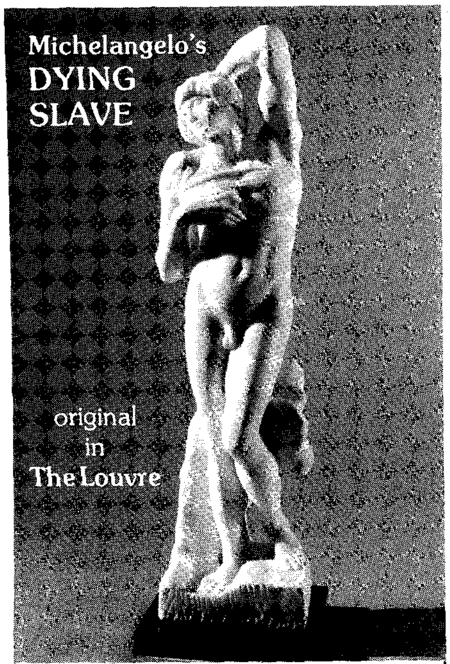
We can't imagine how this man could sort out all he has lived through. A couple of times in the course of the film, Holland presumes to enter young Solly's dreams. These sequences are grimly comic jumbles of images and ideas from the disparate experiences that have imposed themselves on his consciousness: Hitler and Stalin dance with each other, surrounded by a corps of Soviet baby ballerinas; Hitler hides from his own secret police in the closet of the Perels' apartment in Germany, then turns into one of Solly's

Wehrmacht friends and is shot. Solly's dreams are no more legible, and barely more preposterous, than his waking life. (The most nightmarish passage in the film isn't a dream at all. Solly, on leave from the Hitler Youth academy, travels to Lodz and rides through the ghetto in a bus with whitewashed windows; through a tiny gap in the paint he sees a woman disappearing into an alleyway, and believes that it was his mother.) The way Holland tells the story of Salomon Perel in "Europa Europa," no fuller explanation of his unlikely survival seems necessary, or even desirable. In the shimmering golden light of the movie's final shots, the old man on the riverbank looks faintly unreal: he could be a mirage, or the product of an illusionist's arrangement of mirrors. Whatever he is, he is undeniably *there*, before our eyes. Agnieszka Holland delivers him to us as a pure, absurd miracle of history.

THE brand-new, multimillion-dollar, two-hour-and-twenty-one-minute "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" is a dull, dutiful trek through the legend of the bandit of Sherwood Forest, who stole from the rich and gave to the poor. Watching the picture is about as much fun as paying taxes, and far less stirring emotionally. We never feel that anyone involved in making this "Robin Hood" had any real affection for the story. The screenplay, by Pen Densham and John Watson, is a mishmash of halfhearted dramatizations of episodes from the legend and equally halfhearted nods to contemporary attitudes. Since the story takes place at the time of the Crusades, an enterprise that no longer strikes us as especially noble, the writers try to get around our discomfort by providing Robin (Kevin Costner) with a Moorish sidekick, named Azeem (Morgan Freeman). Densham and Watson cook up some expository mumbo-jumbo about Azeem's having to satisfy Allah by protecting this Englishman, who once saved his life, but there's no way to make the black man's presence plausible. Allah notwithstanding, how must Azeem feel about fighting alongside people who have been slaughtering Moors? (Morgan Freeman is, as always, a commanding figure, but there's little pleasure in seeing him in such a misconceived role.) The writers' attempt to distract us from the dubious morality of the Crusades doesn't prevent them from trotting King Richard, who led one of those bloody adventures, onto the screen at the end; triumphantly, he reclaims his kingdom, which Robin and his woodland guerrillas have saved from would-be usurpers, and pronounces his blessing on all those assembled for the movie's happy ending. The appearance of Richard is a gratuitous flourish. His return doesn't move us, because the writers haven't bothered to explain the political situation. They've eliminated John Lackland, Richard's scheming brother, so the villain of the piece, the Sheriff of Nottingham (Alan Rickman), now seems to be acting entirely on his own.

If the movie had an exuberant spirit—as the 1938 "Adventures of Robin Hood," with Errol Flynn, had, in near-manic overabundance—we'd be more inclined to overlook the script's incoherence. But there's not much joy in evidence in "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves." The direction, by Kevin Reynolds, is stolid and impersonal, and Costner seems miscast: he's not a forceful enough actor for this role (and he doesn't have the vocal technique for any historical role). The merry men are an unmemorable lot; even Little John (Nick Brimble) and Friar Tuck (Michael McShane) don't make strong impressions. The movie doesn't give Robin's companions anything interesting to do: in this version, Little John *loses* his famous battle with the hero in the stream—and the audience thus loses its best reason for watching him. This "Robin Hood" doesn't allow us the pleasure, either, of relishing the ingenuity of Robin's band in tormenting the Sheriff and his soldiers. There's no cleverness in the merry men's ambushes; mostly, they just draw their bows and mow down the enemy. It's no wonder the audience seems to perk up only when Rickman is on the screen. He gives a florid, theatrical performance—there's real glee in his malice. Besides, in his climactic duel with Robin, the Sheriff actually proves the better fighter. He wins the sword fight, fair and square, but just as he's about to finish the hero off, Robin whips a little dagger out of his boot and runs his opponent through. It's tough to get excited about a hero whose decisive blow against the forces of evil is, in effect, a sucker punch. This Robin Hood turns out to be the Prince of Sneaks.

—TERRENCE RAFFERTY



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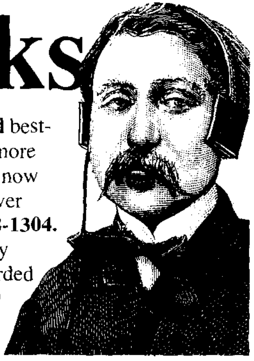

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BOOKS

Inspired Marketeer

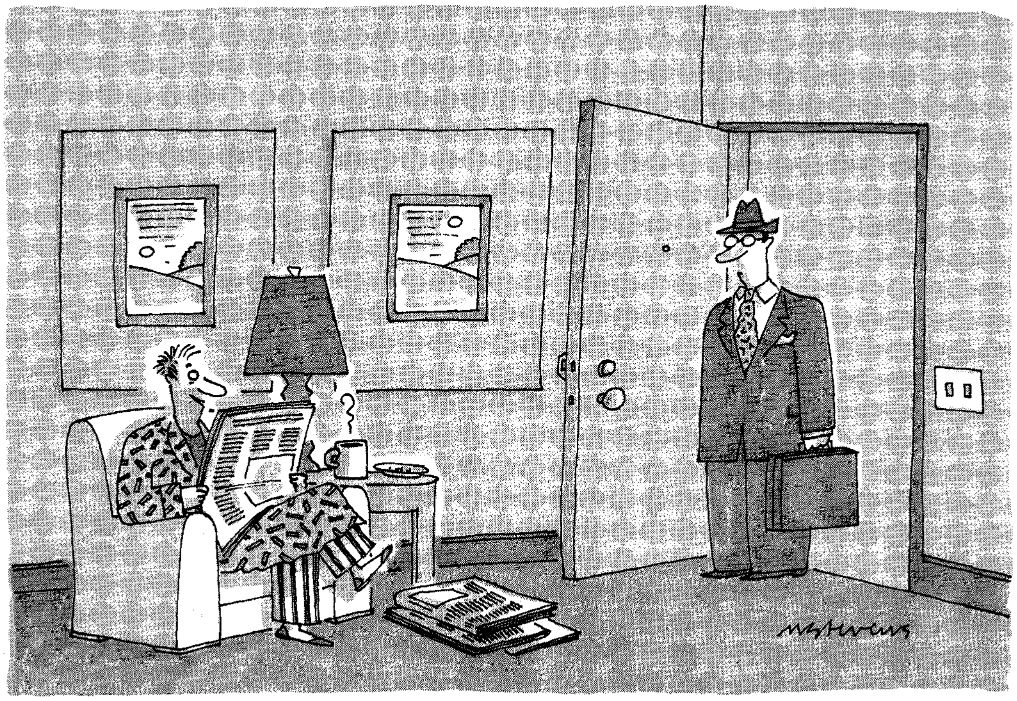
TWENTIETH-CENTURY art has become, notoriously, a dealers' art; the art of the deal has made our pleasure in a museum inextricable from our wonder at how much these things are worth—that little Vermeer in the corner, just past the shoulder of the scowling guard, a few ounces of desiccated canvas and cracked paint, worth millions and millions, more than its weight in uranium! Yet are dealers, aside from the flamboyant Baron Joseph Duveen, interesting enough to become the subjects of biographies? "An Artful Life: A Biography of D. H. Kahnweiler, 1884-1979," by Pierre Assouline (translated from the French by Charles Ruas; Grove Weidenfeld; $24.95), suggests not quite.

Daniel-Heinrich Kahnweiler, born in Mannheim in 1884, had a long life, shaped with an admirable steadiness by a youthful encounter with Cubism; he had decided in his early twenties to become an art dealer, and his family, an alliance of importers on his father's side and bankers and metals speculators on his mother's, was wealthy enough to stake him to a small gallery in Paris. "This is a young man whose family gave him a gallery for his first communion," Ambroise Vollard, the distinguished dealer in the Post-Impressionists, joked to his companion, Pablo Picasso, when they first visited Kahnweiler's modest premises. Slowly, the gallery succeeded, and though twice he was driven from its management—as a German during the First World War, and as a Jew during the Second—his firm survived and, thanks to its hold on Picasso's loyalty, finally prospered. Kahnweiler was a Francophile but remained Germanic: dedicated, methodical, patient, analytical, rigid, and somewhat humorless. He stuck by his principles and his intuitions. At the age of twenty-one, he married a Frenchwoman—Léontine Alexandrine Godon, known as Lucie—two years his senior; he stayed married to her until her death, forty-one years later. To the day of his own death, at ninety-four, he judged all modern art by the intense but narrow illumination that opened for him in 1907, when, in Picasso's shabby studio, he witnessed the birth of Cubism, on the right-hand side of "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon":

> When Kahnweiler finally saw the painting it came as a complete shock; he was astounded at first and then dazzled. He felt that something admirable, extraordinary, inconceivable had occurred.

By the end of his long life, Kahnweiler was revered in France as "the great art dealer of the century" and "the source, the inventor, the promoter of modern art." As early as 1920, he was hearing praise like "If Picasso and Braque created cubism, you assured its existence." Nevertheless, he remains, as better befits a businessman than a biographical hero, rather bland and opaque, cagey and reserved.

The biographer, a Paris-based journalist, does not fail to apply the grease of dramatization to the slow-grinding wheels of his narrative. The viewing in Picasso's studio is made an epic turning point, a moment of mystical fusion: "Standing before Les Demoiselles d'Avignon Kahnweiler and Picasso observed one another; there was mutual understanding and a feeling of solidarity. There was no need for words. From then on Picasso knew that he was not entirely alone, and Kahnweiler knew he had made the right decision in refusing to go to South Africa to manage diamond mines." Picasso, aged twenty-six, worked in a squalid, cluttered studio on the Butte Montmartre; Kahnweiler, three years younger, sold paintings out of a tiny storefront, twelve feet square, near the Madeleine, on the Rue Vignon. When visitors entered, the proprietor did not greet them but let them look in silence and then initiate conversation if they were interested in buying. "He was not one to praise paintings or formulate opinions, organize parties, or bargain over prices as in a flea market. His intention was to transform a commercial success into a moral triumph." Rather than deal in established painters, Kahnweiler wished to discover the geniuses of his own generation, and to bind them to him. "Exclusivity was the basis of his actions and the only rule he would never forsake. . . . For the painters he represented, he wanted to assume all their material worries so that they would be able to devote themselves to their art. . . . In return he in-



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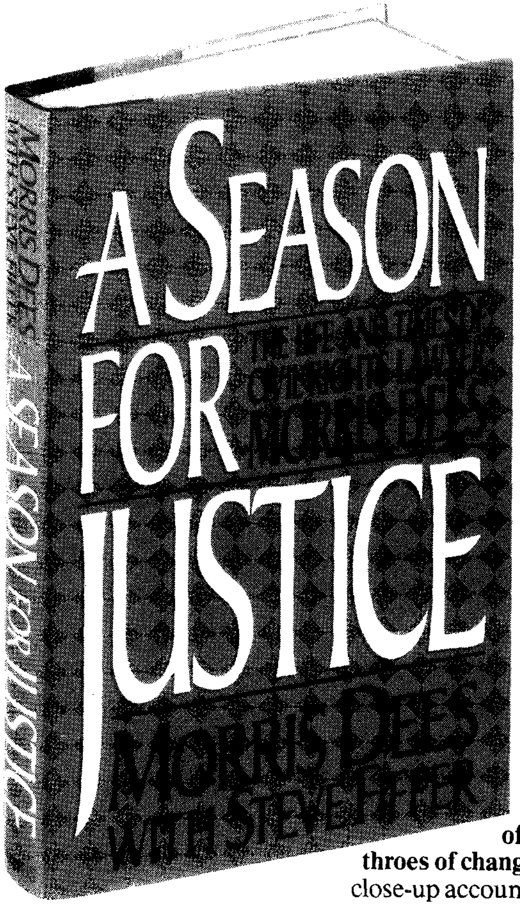
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sisted on exclusive rights to their work." At the 1907 exhibition at the Salon des Indépendants, he was struck by the Fauvist painters, especially Derain and Vlaminck. Disdaining to haggle, he purchased several paintings by them, and he subsequently won their friendship. Kees van Dongen came into the gallery with a roll of large, boldly colored paintings. Kahnweiler visited Georges Braque in the artist's tidy, sparsely furnished studio. Verbal agreements began to secure these young artists; Matisse was already too established and expensive. Kahnweiler soon had doubts about the talent of van Dongen, who boasted that "he could visualize every detail of a painting even before he began." The dealer distrusted such sureness: "All of his life he would be on the side of painters who would begin a painting with only a vague idea of what they wanted to paint, as Pablo Picasso would put it."

With the addition of Picasso—always somewhat independent—to Kahnweiler's little stable of contracted artists, what his biographer calls "the heroic years" began. Selling largely to foreign collectors—the Swiss Hermann Rupf, the German Wilhelm Uhde, the Russians Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov, the Czech Vincenz Kramar, the Americans Gertrude and Leo Stein—Kahnweiler established a lively enough market for his artists. After about 1910, Braque and Picasso vacationed together in the South of France, living and painting side by side with such intimacy and mutual inspiration that their paintings were difficult to distinguish. From Paris, Kahnweiler fed this two-headed monster on news, checks, and practical services, which included shielding Picasso from his soon-to-be-discarded mistress, Fernande Olivier. Olivier provides the only unflattering picture of Kahnweiler in the book: "He was a real Jewish businessman, knowing how to take risks to win, a man of action who bargained for hours until he tired out the artist, who, finally exhausted, would agree to the reduction in price he wanted. He knew very well what he had to gain by exhausting Picasso." Since Picasso was accustomed to being the cause rather than the victim of exhaustion, this power of Kahnweiler's may account for their enduring, however troubled, relationship. They knew each other for sixty-six years. When Picasso died, Kahnweiler refused to read the obituaries or to give interviews.

In return for his proprietary services, the dealer received a stream of paintings, drawings, and etchings. When, in four slovenly auctions in 1921, 1922, and 1923, his gallery, confiscated as German property during the First World War, was liquidated as part of unpaid war reparations, modern art had never been sold on such a scale. A total of a hundred and thirty-two Braques, a hundred and thirty-two Picassos, a hundred and eleven Derains, and two hundred and five Vlamincks changed hands, not to mention fifty-six paintings by Juan Gris and forty-three by Fernand Léger (who had both come under contract to Kahnweiler in 1913), and numerous drawings, gouaches, and prints. The Ministry of Finance and the Commission on War Reparation earned a total of over seven hundred thousand francs—about a hundred and twelve thousand 1923 dollars—for this dispersal of hundreds of paintings, a great many of them to foreign buyers, since generally the French public was indifferent to Cubism and the French critics were downright hostile. (Like "Impressionism," the name "Cubism" was bestowed derisively, in the latter case by Louis Vauxcelles, the most widely printed French critic of the time, who also christened "les Fauves." He had less luck calling Léger's work "tubism," perhaps his most cunning neologism of all; unaccountably, it failed to catch on.)

The war, enlisting some artists and isolating others, ended the gregariousness of Cubism, though a number of painters continued to practice it. At the Kahnweilers' Sunday lunches in Boulogne-Billancourt, Juan and Josette Gris were faithful guests. Modest, thoughtful, somewhat dry, and stolidly loyal, Gris was the painter closest to Kahnweiler's conservative heart and most congenial to his theories of art. Though Kahnweiler continued to function as a dealer and connoisseur to the verge of the nineteen-eighties, he never really got over Cubism. Surrealism he tolerated only to the extent of taking on a former Surrealist, André Masson, as the major ornament of his post-auction gallery, and abstraction he could never abide. He snubbed Joan Miró, characterizing him as "a talented minor painter unaware of his own limitations," and spoke of Dalí as "always the same careful maniac and for me, very Ecole des Beaux-Arts." A large body of painters, including Frank Kupka and Marcel Duchamp, he dismissed as *ersatz Kubisten*, and toward the end, asked to name some great artists after Picasso and Braque, could name only Masson, André Beaudin, and Eugène de Kermadec—all represented by his gallery. Kahnweiler's ideas were strict, systematic, and insistent. His attitude toward art had a religious solemnity; he once wrote a friend, "It is in this union, it seems to me, which I experience before a work of art, that I can know what saints must experience in their union . . . with God." Art must strive for a union with the real. To Picasso he said, "I believe that what is most important about painting is its creative interaction with the external world." Picasso's violent and sensual venturesomeness continued to startle and amaze him. In 1932, Picasso told him, "I would like to paint the way a blind man would describe the shape of a woman's ass," and showed him two nudes that elicited from the stunned Kahnweiler the remark "It seems as if a satyr who had murdered a woman had painted this picture." But the satyr never committed the sin of abstract painting, which Kahnweiler dismissed as "decorative." In his "Confessions Esthétiques" (1963) he wrote:

> It is appropriate to bring up a trend that has set for itself the goal of painting without a subject, in order to compose harmonies of colors on the canvas without making any reference to an object in nature. . . . The problem of painting, the concentration on the multiplicity of forms in the world within the unity of a work of art, is a problem unknown to this school. It has cast aside the problems with which lyrical painting has wrestled for years. The works are decorative and will ornament walls, but that's all. It's not artistic vision that is the genesis of the work, it's the sense of decoration. That is all that these paintings ever will be, decorations.

The biographer, in his own task of representation, did not have an easy wrestle with this prim, censorious worshipper of painting, this selectively enraptured bystander. Even the most hazardous and dramatic episodes of Kahnweiler's life, his survival of the two World Wars, come over as rather tame. A pacifist and far from prescient in international matters, he thought right up through July of 1914 that war between France and Germany was impossible; he and Lucie were on vacation in Upper Bavaria the day before Germany delivered its ultimatum to France. They crossed the Swiss border in the middle of the night and, after four months of indecision in Italy, took refuge in Bern with his old friend Hermann Rupf. Kahnweiler spent five years in Switzerland, in a state of boredom and anxiety. Had he taken Picasso's earlier advice and become a French citizen, or had he taken the advice of his American partner Joseph Brenner and shipped his paintings to New York, much of his postwar misfortune might have been avoided. As it was, he managed to rebuild the gallery—renamed Galerie Simon, after his silent partner André Simon, to avoid possible restrictions against ownership by a German citizen—and steered it through the difficult Depression years, when even the rich were slow to pay their bills.

He was no more prescient about the Second World War than about its predecessor; in 1933 he believed that "the Nazis would be quickly voted out of office," and in 1939, "when Germany invaded Denmark and Norway, he still believed that Hitler would be defeated." Fleeing Paris at the very last moment, the Kahnweilers made their way to the Limousin region, where one of his painters, Elie Lascaux, who had married Lucie's sister Berthe, had a home in a former abbey called Le Repaire, near the village of St. Léonard-de-Noblat. Here, in a community of Paris exiles that included Raymond Queneau, in a pleasant atmosphere of country walks ("They combed the village for vestiges of Romanesque art, and took long walks on trails and through chestnut groves, all the while keeping up an endless flow of conversation") and leisurely reading and writing, Kahnweiler whiled away the early forties; when, in August of 1943, the Gestapo appeared at the door and rifled through his store of Cubist canvases in a search for Resistance weapons, the Kahnweilers found refuge in Gascony, "and life in the countryside continued as before." For a Jewish dealer in "degenerate art," who, furthermore, had been a German draft dodger in the First World War, he was very fortunate; he even saved his gallery, through the device of selling it, when the call for the Aryanization of businesses went out from the German occupiers, to his unimpeachably French and Catholic sister-in-law and gallery associate, Louise Leiris. The Galerie Kahnweiler, which had become the Galerie Simon in 1920, now acquired its third and last name, Galerie Louise Leiris.

In October of 1944, Kahnweiler returned to a freshly liberated Paris and assumed his postwar persona as a *monstre sacré*, the man who had marketed the Cubists two wars ago, in the laughing springtime of modernism. He shaved his head, and took on the gnomish look of a guru. He guarded the old flame fiercely: asked to help organize a Cubist retrospective for the Venice Biennale, "he featured the four great painters: Picasso, Braque, Gris, and Léger—but obstinately refused to include the works of 'Metzinger and his consorts,'" lesser Cubists he had always scorned. As he got older, the list of his pet peeves grew to include "critics, abstract art, the government, New York as the art center, art for speculation, the politics of museum acquisition." About most things he was probably right, but it makes dull copy. Even the translator seems to be a bit *ennuyé*, laying down such absent-minded English as "Seurat intrigued him in spite of the fact that his experimentation with pointillism was a promising undertaking only for the realistic subject of his paintings," "As the son of the mayor of Evrette, his parents' ambition was to have him become an ophthalmologist," and "If he had not been Kahnweiler he could have been an anachronism, two generations later." A few piquant facts about modern art emerge from these many circumspect, circumstantial pages: Klee wrote with his right hand but painted with his left; André Malraux, who wound up scrubbing the façades of Paris for de Gaulle, was considered as a young man "slightly crazy, and definitely out of control"; Picasso thought that "collectors always prefer crusty paintings," by which he meant unfinished, confirming Gris's lament "I would so much like my painting to have the ease and coquettish quality of unfinished work." A more inspired biographer might have done more with all this material, but it's as if Kahnweiler didn't wish to be inspiring. His austere and basically humble personality im-

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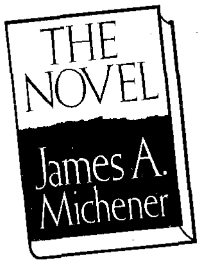

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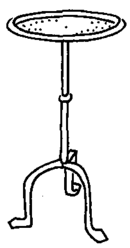

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poses a curious damp propriety upon his memorial. Painting and dealing keep their secrets. For all his years of survivorship, Kahnweiler's claim to fame remains that youthful moment in 1907 when he looked "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon" in the eyes and didn't blink.

—John Updike

BRIEFLY NOTED

FICTION

The Alchymist's Journal, by Evan S. Connell (North Point; $19.95). A feast of words, a poem, a tract, a set of pseudo-documents—one thing this book is not is a novel. There is no story, and character is barely suggested by the abstract musings of seven sixteenth-century alchemists, speculating on their craft and fulminating against each other. The voice of one is balanced and judicious while tossing up gems of earnest nonsense. Another writes declarative, listlike verse. Paracelsus, accused of heresy, rages. They deal with less than pressing questions, even metaphorically ("Is not the body woven of starlight?"), but also with the most pressing—the nature of nature, and the vexed, unnatural nature of man. With great application on the part of the reader, and much extra-textual investigation, a story could be deduced or inferred from this text, of "a wandering magus" who would "resurrect us." He would be that other kind of alchemist, a poet or novelist, who through his works transmutes the dross of ordinary life into the gold of art. This is as much a cautionary tale about the dangers of the imagination—by the author of "Mrs. Bridge," among other novels—as it is a celebration of its powers.

Such a Long Journey, by Rohinton Mistry (Knopf; $22). Nominally the story of a middle-class Parsi family in Bombay, this novel is about India—the financial and moral corruption of its government, the physical corruption of its sewers and streets, and the dividing and unifying forces of personality, religion, and station in life. In feeling and form it could be a play or a movie. During the first act, the theme of the Noble family's lost bookstore is sounded repeatedly, and so is that of Gustad Noble's satisfaction in his elder son's admission to India's élite engineering school. Various neighbors in the family's Zoroastrian compound wander onto the scene to play out feuds, to comment, and to snoop. Then a mysterious request comes from a long-absent and long-silent friend; the son refuses to become an engineer; the young daughter falls ill. Yet despite riots, war (over Bangladesh), a railway strike, and dirty tricks in high places, the overriding sense is of human tenderness.

GENERAL

Why Americans Hate Politics, by E. J. Dionne, Jr. (Simon & Schuster; $22.95). A Washington *Post* political reporter offers an astute, entertaining analysis of the reasons that contemporary political debates and divisions misrepresent American issues as American voters see them, and leave the public disenchanted, despairing, or distrustful of the American political process. Mr. Dionne flatters nobody as he dissects the intellectual failings and internal conflicts of liberals and conservatives in the decades since the end of the Second World War, and with a keen historical sense he explains how we got into this mess, demonstrating the traditions from which the so-called new left and right descend. While our polarizing campaigns artfully manipulate divisive symbols, poll after poll shows that American voters appreciate complexity and nuance. The bad, or discouraging, news is that the author can't tell us how to revive our enthusiasm for democracy and make our politics reflect our collective common sense.

"Shattered Nerves": Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England, by Janet Oppenheim (Oxford; $27.95). A sensitive American historian recalls a medical profession that, scrambling for status in a society at once pushy and stratified, cosseted the rich and experimented on the poor while trying to understand a common malady. Medical practitioners only gradually learned to distinguish among illnesses, and to determine whether their origin was organic or functional; for example, anorexia was recognized in the eighteen-seventies, but what was called "general paralysis of the insane" wasn't conclusively identified as the last stage of syphilis until 1905. For much of that era, scientific uncertainty encouraged quacks and fads; celebrities from Bulwer-Lytton to Tennyson tried the water cure in vogue in the middle of the century. Victorian medicine's confusion about women's nature in health and in illness has been amply documented; Professor Oppenheim suggests that sexual repressiveness and sexually allotted roles also harmed men, who, in a period in which manliness meant will power and self-control, were taught that depression was their own fault.

STREET CLOSED
os

An Essay on French Verse: For Readers of English Poetry, by Jacques Barzun (New Directions; $22.95 cloth, $11.95 paper). Over the past couple of centuries, some formidable native readers of English poetry have maligned French verse as unvaried, uncolorful, undramatic, unplayful—in short, as unreadable. In this riposte, Jacques Barzun contends that the criticisms are founded on a condition common to the English ear: tone deafness to the delicacies of French sound and thought. "French is a vowel language: that is the great principle to remember," he advises, and the rest of his brilliant, sweeping, conversational essay descends from this principle like a grand staircase. The reader is given a thorough tour of French poetic style from the troubadours to the mid-twentieth century, along with a history of the French language, a perspective on Western culture, and, for good measure, a survey of English literature—all in a hundred and twenty-six pages. The hero of the book is Victor Hugo, the author of the sentence that seems to guide Mr. Barzun's own writing: "Each word is in itself a small orchestra in which the vowel is the voice and the consonant the instrument, the accompaniment."

•

Prince, sporting a new hairdo, has formed a new band, the New Power Generation, with whom which he will be touring with later this year.—*Photo caption in the Gainesville (Fla.) Sun.*

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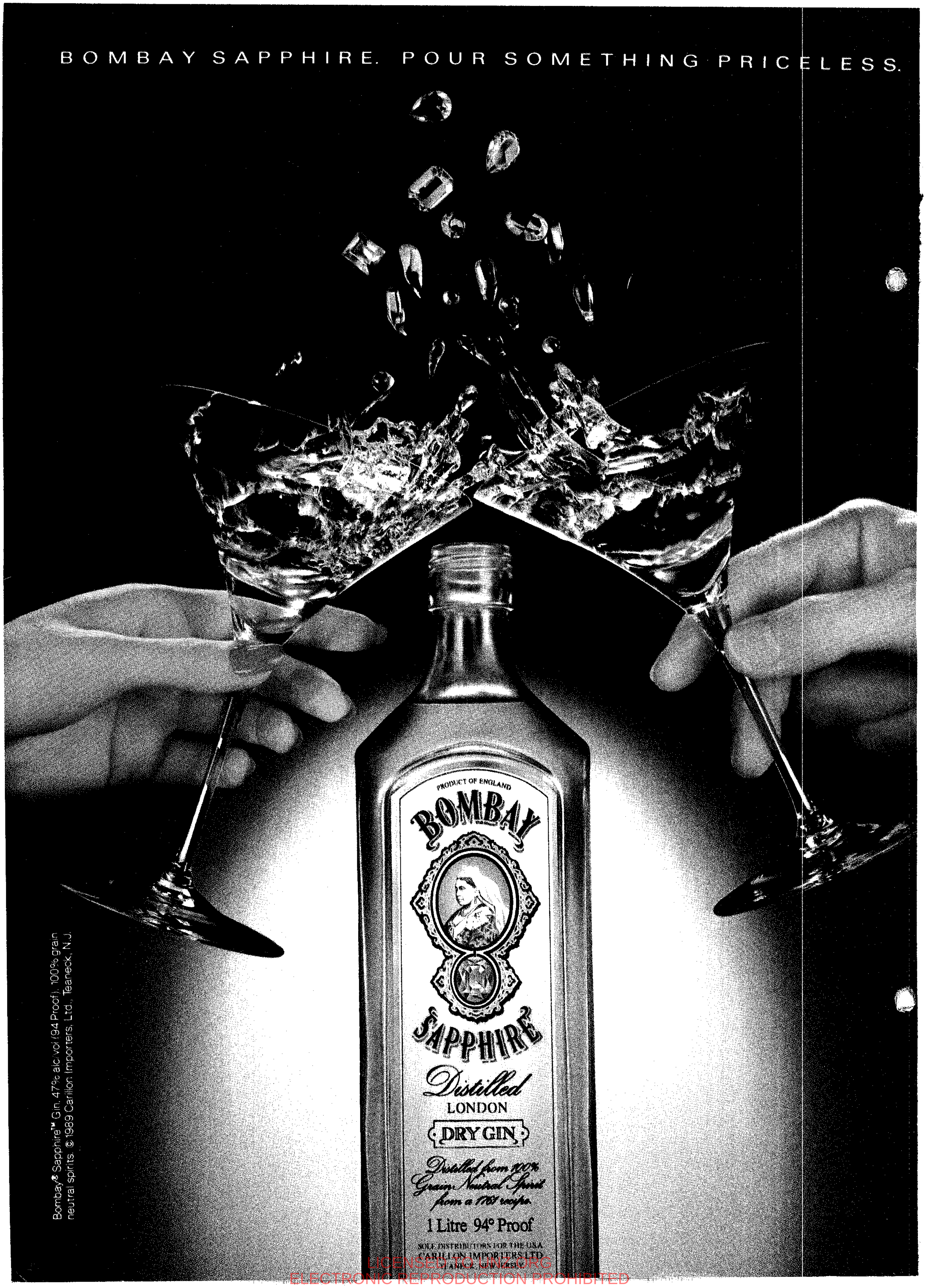
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